

**CLASS 15**

# Connecting with Brethren: Your “Approach” to Others

**CLASS OVERVIEW**

In this class we will review the importance of:

- “Starting where people are” when you work with them, instead of assuming that they will automatically understand where you are coming from.
- Challenging people to discover some of the answers for themselves.
- Listening carefully to the entirety of people's concerns.
- Teaching with different learning styles in mind.
- Relating to your audience through examples, situations and stories.

**Opening Group Questions:**

- As ambassadors for Christ and leaders in His Church, what can we do to help ensure that people learn from our teaching, examples and conversations?
- What can leaders and teachers do to increase their teaching effectiveness?

**I. Introduction**

We are all different in many ways. We come from different backgrounds, have different life experiences, have been taught differently at various points in our lives—and often learn differently.

While one person may learn very well by just listening, another person will need to ask questions and get those questions answered in order to learn the same thing. While one person may learn better by taking notes, another person will need to prove what is being said by consulting the original sources. Some people remember better when concepts are associated with music or something familiar. Others learn better when they can see pictures, diagrams or other visual cues.

Modern research continues to demonstrate a long-known fact: *there are many different learning styles*—ways in which people learn. The challenge for leaders is to consider these different learning styles as we work with, educate and teach others the Truth of God. If we teach and educate in **only** the way that we are most comfortable, we will “reach” some of our audience, but many will be turned off or misunderstand what we are saying.

In this class, we will review a number of different techniques, methods, or ways that we can share ideas and concepts, so that the majority of people will benefit. Whether we are sharing information with a larger audience—through a sermon or sermonette—or we are having an informal conversation trying to answer a new Church member's questions, these methods can be useful. Additionally, these methods are useful when leading (and teaching) groups in other settings.

**II. Methods of Effective Leaders****A. Practice What You Preach:**

The old adage “practice what you preach” speaks directly of one's example. Example is one of the most profound and most powerful teachers available to us. Our example can either powerfully

reinforce what we say and thus add to our credibility, or it can contradict our words, destroying our credibility. The Apostle Paul understood the power of example when he drew attention to his own example and that of Christ: "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). Christ also spoke about the power of example and in fact strongly criticized the leaders of His day (scribes and Pharisees) for their poor examples. Seven times in Matthew 23, Christ called these leaders hypocrites because they preached one thing and acted in an opposite manner.

For example:

What kind of message might we send if we encourage those who may be assisting us with a Church project to submit to our authority and follow our lead, then turn around and talk disrespectfully about a deacon, an elder or the pastor?

Our children, and especially teenagers, have the unique ability to spot hypocritical behavior in adults. In most cases, if adults appear to be hypocrites, teenagers will lose all respect for them. Although they may be a bit extreme in their reactions, can you blame them? How many of us want to listen to and follow someone who says "You act this way, but I do not have to because I am the leader"? Not very many of us.

As leaders, we must constantly be vigilant and aware of our words and our actions. Our words and actions must correspond if we are to be effective leaders. When there is a mismatch, we must be willing to acknowledge our mistake, repent and change.

B. Begin Where Your Audience Is / Find Common Ground:

**Group Question:** How successful will people be in growing and overcoming if they think that they must change their entire life, "effective immediately?"

In the field of community development—working with communities to help them make positive changes—there is a concept of "beginning where the people are." The idea is that one cannot have high and lofty goals for others and expect them to immediately achieve them. To be effective, you need to start where they are, on their level, and help them progress slowly from there.

Example 1:

If individuals have not prayed to God in years, we cannot expect them to immediately start praying three times a day, for an hour each time. The reality is that they may need to learn how to pray all over again. In fact, perhaps they never really learned to pray. They will need to be taught how to pray and encouraged in this behavior. It may be an accomplishment for them to pray for five minutes once a day. Just as our Father in heaven is patient with us and does not expect perfection from us immediately (He gives us a lifetime), we MUST NOT expect it of others.

Example 2:

Perhaps a new person comes to us after Church with a question about the Sabbath. We must not just "assume" that he/she knows everything that we know. If we do this, we may miss some very important points in our explanation. A better way to handle the situation might be to ask the person what they do understand, and as we explain, continually ask if there are questions and if the explanation makes sense.

***Finding Common Ground:***

Two cannot walk together unless they are agreed (Amos 3:3). If we do not find areas in common with those that we speak with, they will have difficulty relating to us. In fact, they may choose not to listen to us. Finding common ground with people, areas where we agree, may not come easily. It often takes time and observation to understand where your audience is coming from.

The Apostle Paul set a tremendous example of finding common ground when visiting the city of Athens, Greece (Acts 17:16-34). In this example, Paul observed that the city was "given over to

idols," and he became engaged in a discussion with some locals in the market (Note: When traveling, one learns that local gathering places are excellent locations to learn about the local culture and society—Paul obviously knew this principle). Paul also learned that the Athenians were a curious people and loved to debate and learn new things. Paul was taken peacefully from the market to the Areopagus, where a crowd of people began asking him questions about God and his "strange beliefs."

Here, Paul could have easily called the crowd a "bunch of pagans" and condemned them for their sins, but he did not. Instead, he *started where the people were*, building on a common understanding. The Athenians had statues and alters built to many different gods and goddesses. Paul, in his wisdom, picked one alter that was dedicated "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD" and began to explain to the Athenians who this "unknown" god really was—the true God. So, instead of being run out of town for blaspheming the Athenian gods, Paul was allowed to preach about the true God—because he built on a common belief in this "unknown God."

As we come into contact with people new to the truth, or interact with long-time members, it is often very helpful to begin with principles that you both agree on. Then, once you have gained their trust and respect, you can slowly, patiently, and lovingly present ideas that may be new or unfamiliar, or may not be clearly understood.

### C. Relate and Connect to Your Audience:

Have you ever listened to a speaker that you could not "connect" with or relate to? Have you ever listened to someone speak who seemed to be talking to everyone in the audience but you? Have you ever been in a conversation with someone you felt could not "relate" to what you were saying?

This situation occurs frequently in conversations, lectures, presentations, and occasionally sermonettes or sermons. But WHY does it happen?

One reason this event occurs is because people fail to "listen" to others who are speaking (we discussed listening in detail in the lecture on Communication). Another important reason why speakers and listeners fail to "connect" is because speakers get so involved in their topic that they do not even try to "relate" to their audience.

Some people enjoy factual information. They can talk about facts for hours without growing bored. Many others, however, have difficulty listening solely to facts. Put these two types of people together and you have a recipe for frustration.

#### **What can you do to better relate to others?**

1. *Use Stories to Clarify Your Point.* When talking to others or speaking to groups, it is "easy" to list scripture after scripture or to provide a list of statistics. If you do this, your audience will soon lose interest—be it one person or a room full of people. In order to keep their interest and present information in a way that your audience will remember it, reinforce your key points with a story or example. Most people enjoy stories. Stories contain characters and experiences that we can all relate to and connect with. This is one reason why Christ spoke in parables and used stories to illustrate his points. Stories engage a mind that might otherwise become overwhelmed or disengaged by an excess of facts. Bible stories are always excellent to use. When you use personal stories, make sure they fit the situation and are appropriate from a godly perspective. Also, make sure that you chose stories that you know your audience will relate to and understand.
2. *Use Personal Examples When Appropriate.* Personal examples help people see the human side of generic principles. For some listeners, personal examples help otherwise sanitary examples "come alive." Personal examples can also help the presenter seem a little bit more "real" to those listening.

Cautions when using personal examples:

- Make sure that your example is "clean" and appropriate for the audience. Distasteful or crass examples are never appropriate. Private personal situations, "inside jokes," and sharing names are also never appropriate.
- Be careful not to use personal examples that build you up excessively or may cause others to think you are vain or self-righteous. Also take care not to "put yourself down." Humility is one thing, but demeaning one's self is not appropriate.

**An important principle to remember is that if you are in doubt about the appropriateness of an example or story, DO NOT use it. A leader should always err on the side of caution.**

D. Avoid Always TELLING the Answers:

Some people can sit patiently and just listen to a lengthy explanation; however, most need to be challenged—stimulated—in order to maintain their interest.

Jesus Christ was the greatest teacher to ever walk this earth, and we can learn a great deal if we follow His example. Rather than always telling His audiences the answers (in some cases thousands of people, in other cases just a few), Christ often challenged them with a question.

For example, when the Pharisees and Herodians tried to trap Christ, by asking whether God's people should pay taxes or not, Christ did not immediately say—"Of course you should pay taxes—and pay your tithes too!" Instead, He asked for them to show Him a coin. Then, He asked them whose image was on the coin. They responded "Caesar." Then Jesus made the famous observation, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's (coins in his image), and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17). Christ involved the people (critics in this case) in discovering the answer. And not only did they give Him the answer, they found the answer in such a way that they could not dispute it. We are told that they "marveled at Him" because of the way in which He answered, or had them answer their own question (Mark 12:17).

When people ask us questions and are truly looking for answers, we want their questions to be answered in such a way that they will "remember" and learn from the process. Challenging people to discover the answer, or helping them at least discover the "reasons for" the answer, will leave them with a much more memorable and deeper understanding of the answer, than if we just told it to them. Additionally, by helping them discover the answer on their own, we also help them build the skills to be able to repeat the process by themselves in the future.

We must strike a balance with this technique though. We do want to encourage brethren to "seek wise council" and approach the Church leadership—seeking "iron" to help sharpen themselves. We must make sure not to "turn people away" when they come to us with sincere questions. We must also remember that there is a time and there are certain questions or situations that should be pointed to the minister or Church pastor. Again, "if in doubt," direct them to the minister.

E. Really Listen to What They Have to Say:

Many of us love to "hear ourselves talk." We like the sound of our own voice and we are even, at times, impressed with how well we are able to answer a matter. The challenge for leaders, and all Christians, is to know when to speak and when to hold our tongues.

How well we listen, and how well we answer questions, will greatly affect the reputation we develop. Have you ever known someone who is SO READY to give you an answer that they often formulate their response before you are through describing the situation to them?

Wise King Solomon made a helpful observation in Proverbs 18:13—"He who answers a matter before

he hears it, it is folly and shame to him." Why is it so important to listen completely and then respond? What if, because we are so quick to respond, we fail to hear some of the important details that are being related to us? We may give wrong and even dangerous advice! Additionally, in the eyes of the one sharing with us, we may begin to lose credibility.

Another related proverb reads this way: "The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him" (Prov 18:17). If we make a judgment call based on half of the information (one person's testimony) then we may be wrong and appear foolish in the eyes of those who are watching us.

God, through the Apostle James, gives us some excellent advice: "...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). We should try to really hear and thoroughly understand what is being said, and slow to give an answer. If we try to formulate our answers as the story is being told, we will likely "miss" part of the story and also rudely interrupt those telling the story. True Christian leaders are "good listeners."

#### F. Look for and Use "Teachable Moments"

A "teachable moment" is an unplanned, sudden opportunity to teach a lesson. Good leaders, whose thoughts are constantly focused on godly things (Phil 4:8), are always looking for and praying about situations that illustrate godly principles. One cannot "conjure up" a teachable moment. Conversely, we are told that "wisdom cries aloud in the streets" (Prov 1:20, KJV), and if we are truly inclining our ear to wisdom and God's way (Psalm 78:1) we should be able to identify, more and more, these teachable moments.

Jesus Christ gives us excellent examples of teachable moments. In fact, it appears that most of His ministry consisted of teachable moments—He was always looking for ways to profoundly teach godly principles. One specific example occurred in Matthew 12:9-14. In the synagogue was a man with a withered hand. Rather than pass by the man and focus on something else, Christ stopped and healed him. He also used a very salient example—one that everyone could relate to: "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (vv. 11-12). Christ used an example that was relevant to everyone. He then pointed out the obvious fact that a person was much more valuable and important than an animal. Christ's use of this teachable moment had a profound effect on the Pharisees, as well as on His own disciples.

### III. Conclusion

God chooses people with diverse backgrounds and experiences to be in His Church and to serve as His leaders. Despite our backgrounds and the fact that He called us, in most cases because we are NOT mighty and wise but because we are the weak of the world (1 Cor 1:26-31), God did call us to "become perfect" just as He is perfect (Matt 5:48). Because of this, we should all constantly be working on building our leadership skills—our Christian talents. Effective leaders employ and use many different techniques and methods to improve their leading effectiveness. These methods or techniques do not "make" the leader, but rather help the leader lead more effectively. As you build these skills, you, too, will become a more effective leader and more useful tool to God.

#### Optional Homework for Next Class: (choose one assignment to complete)

- With your spouse or another Church member, discuss how one goes about gaining the trust of others.
- Do a brief Bible study on the concept of being trustworthy.
- Write a brief two-page essay discussing how trust is important for a leader.

Handout 1—Class 15

## “Approaches” of Effective Leaders

Effective leaders use the following methods to help those they serve:

1. **Practice what you preach**—Example is essential for all leaders. If your teachings differ from your actions, you will lose credibility in the eyes of your followers and those whom you serve.
2. **Begin where your audience is / Find common ground**—If you begin where your audience is and in an area that you both agree on, they will want to listen to you and will be much more teachable.
3. **Relate and connect to your audience**—If your audience can relate to you and your examples, and views you as a “real” person, they will be much more likely to follow.
4. **Avoid always TELLING the answers**—Effective leaders do not “spoon feed” their audience, nor do they force them to find all the answers by themselves. Effective leaders also know that when an individual discovers truth for themselves, they are more apt to “hold fast” to it.
5. **Really listen to what people have to say**—Often those in leadership positions will assume they know what is being said, based on a few introductory comments—then they proceed to answer what they thought was being said. Effective leaders listen to the whole situation and try to completely understand before dispensing advice.
6. **Look for and use “relevant examples”**—Nothing is more effective than a relevant example. Looking for poignant and relevant examples and then using them to support a point is a hallmark of an effective leader.