

*A Master Class in Leadership:
One Day with the Savior
“I Have Set an Example for You”
(3 Nephi 18:16)*

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I am very grateful for this opportunity to be with you today. It is truly an honor. And I mean that. We love President and Sister Worthen and sustain them completely. Mainly, it is a blessing to be with my sweet wife, Yvonne. I just feel more at ease when we are together.

Yesterday my three-year-old granddaughter Mila asked me if I was nervous about today.

I said, “No, but what should I do if I get nervous?”

And she said, “Just cry.”

So I’m hoping it doesn’t get to that point.

I have always enjoyed studying leadership. My fascination with leadership has led me to read constantly about various leaders and leadership teachings over the years. If you look at my nightstand right now, you will see books on political, sports, and military leaders—mostly sports leaders right now.

Now, I am going to start with a story, but please don’t think that this story is about me. It’s not. But

it is about a key lesson that I learned. May 15, 1993, was a much-anticipated day for me. It was the day of the UCLA Book Fair, and one of the speakers was Warren G. Bennis, my favorite leadership thinker and author at the time. I had studied his books and could not wait to hear him speak in person. I got my ticket and arrived early on that hot day in hopes of snagging a good seat in the auditorium to listen to him. I even took my copy of his book *On Becoming a Leader*, just in case I met him and it wasn’t too awkward to ask him to sign it. But I knew that it was highly unlikely, especially as I saw the line to get into the auditorium grow and grow.

While I was waiting in line, I noticed an elderly gentleman who seemed lost or disoriented in the heat, so I asked him if he was okay. He said that he really wanted to hear Warren Bennis talk but didn’t know where to go. I told him that he was in the right place and that the long line was to get into the auditorium. He said that he didn’t have a

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ticket but hoped to get in somehow. I told him the event was completely sold out but that if he held my place in line, I would go ask if there was the possibility of a standby list.

The person at the door told me that there was some overflow and that the man could just go in with me. I went back and gave him the good news. When we entered the auditorium, we saw Warren Bennis way up on the stage talking to some people.

The man said to me, “Let’s go talk to him.”

My response: “Uh, no. C’mon, you’re going to get us kicked out. Let’s just sit down!”

But he insisted, so I followed him up to the stage, just waiting for security to tackle us. Suddenly Warren Bennis looked up and saw the man, hurried over and brought him up on stage, and hugged him. I soon realized that the older man was his brother and that they hadn’t seen each other for years. His brother then pulled me onto the stage to meet Warren Bennis! He told his brother how I had helped him outside and how he might not have been able to get into the auditorium if it weren’t for me. It was completely untrue, but I loved hearing it. Warren Bennis then hugged me and thanked me. He saw my copy of his book *On Becoming a Leader* and asked if he could sign it for me.

Now, the point of the story is this: As he signed my book, Warren Bennis said something that I will never forget. He said:

You know, I write a lot about the characteristics of leaders and how they need to examine their lives. I don’t write as much about how they need to care for those who follow them. The first principle of leadership should always be leading others with kindness.

It is easy for leaders to get caught up in self, details, administration, challenges, or even vision, but, in the end, leadership is about serving, teaching, and encouraging and truly caring for individuals with kindness. *It is not about taking charge or being in charge but blessing those who are in your charge.*

Make no mistake about it, your loving and inspired leadership is needed in the Church and in the world as we prepare for the glorious Second

Coming of the Savior. One of my favorite quotes comes from President Howard W. Hunter:

The need for leadership . . . will increase dramatically. What is needed is not just young people of training and skill, but rather we will need a generation of great faith, those who have learned discipline and discipleship. What will be needed is a generation who understand not only how to organize a ward but also how to build faith, how to sustain the weak and faltering, and how to defend the truth. What is needed is a generation whose glory comes from their capacity to comprehend light and truth, who can with that light and truth then enlarge their capacity to love and to serve.¹

This speaks specifically about you and directly to you. You are the “generation of great faith” who enters this incredible and inspiring university to learn discipline and discipleship to go forth and to serve—and, yes, this high praise comes from a diehard Ute! A great way to learn how to build faith, sustain the weak and faltering, defend the truth, comprehend the light, and enlarge your capacity to love and to serve is to study the Savior and His teachings to the Nephites found in 3 Nephi.

Teachings on Leadership from the Savior Himself

In all of my reading, I have never found better teachings on leadership than those from the Savior Himself. I am fascinated by the first day of His visit to the Americas described in chapters 11 to 18 in 3 Nephi. I have loved studying this topic in preparation for this devotional. It has blessed me, and I hope that it blesses you too. I pray that the Holy Ghost will be with us to help us learn to lead like the Savior in all that we do.

The heart of this talk is that Jesus Christ truly is the Master Leader, and in that single day with the Nephites, He taught all that anyone would need to know about how to be a great leader in *any* situation. The lessons operate on all levels: in your family, in church, in the workplace, or on teams or among friends. Great joy is experienced in helping and lifting others and seeing them progress and find purpose. That is leadership.

The final twenty-four-hour period of the Savior’s mortal life is the greatest model of

leadership by example and selfless actions in the history of the world—bar none. But I think that His first day with the Nephites is one of the greatest days of leadership teaching in recorded history. Think of it: He had precious little time, given that He had other sheep to visit. He had to be concise, clear, powerful, and inspired in His limited time. So what did He do? Where was His focus? How did He teach? What can we learn about principles of leadership and how does His leadership in that single day stack up to leadership concepts taught today?

Let me start with *universal leadership principles* that can be learned from the Savior during that first amazing day with the Nephites.

I know as you prayerfully study His visit that you will find many more leadership principles, but let me suggest three.

Focus on Individuals

After bearing witness of who He was and of His mission, Jesus invited the multitude—all twenty-five hundred of them—to come unto Him “one by one.”² That same day He healed the sick and afflicted one by one.³ He later “took their little children, one by one, and blessed them, and prayed . . . for them.”⁴ He ministered to and ordained the twelve disciples one by one.⁵

No matter the size or composition of your organization, it will always be a collection of individuals. Regardless of the quorum, class, team, or organization—church or otherwise—focusing on the progress of individuals will lead to greater achievement and more joy. This principle applies in every setting. In church, we can think of it as looking at each individual and determining the next ordinance that they need to continue their progression on the covenant path toward eternal life with a loving Heavenly Father. Outside of church, it can mean helping others achieve their potential. It always requires a caring focus on the one.

Build Up and Teach Your Leaders

In just this one-day account of the Savior, there are at least ten times the Savior turned to the twelve disciples He had called⁶ to teach them specifically about their calling. He taught them

how to do something or how they could bless the people. He modeled what they were to do. He patiently taught them how to baptize, how to bless the sacrament, and how to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost. At one point the Savior turned to the multitude and said, “Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants.”⁷ Can you imagine how those disciples must have felt to learn specifically about their calling from the Savior and then to hear the Savior of the world acknowledge and sustain them so publicly?

As a leader, you are to lift others by teaching them what to do and why and then building them up through sincere praise. If you can do that, productivity, effectiveness, growth, or any other measurement will improve. No matter where you are in an organization—ecclesiastical or professional—you can lead, you can lift, you can bless. With that focus, people will want you in their organizations and others will want to work with you.

In every calling in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, you are called to bless others. Every leader is a teacher, and every teacher lifts and inspires others to learn more.

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

*Effective teaching is the very essence of leadership in the Church. Eternal life will come only as men and women are taught with such effectiveness that they change and discipline their lives. They cannot be coerced into righteousness or into heaven. They must be led, and that means teaching.*⁸

The Savior set this perfect leadership example, and we must follow Him.

Teach Repetitively

Christ did not worry about repetitious teachings and sermons. Much of what is captured in chapters 12, 13, and 14 of 3 Nephi can be compared to what the Savior taught during His mortal ministry. For example, consider chapter 11 of 3 Nephi. Jesus teaches of baptism and mentions it thirteen times in twenty verses. And as He speaks of the doctrine of Christ, He mentions

it nine times in those very same verses.⁹ Think of how this repetitious teaching of the doctrine of Christ cements in the mind of the learner the importance of baptism.

I suspect that there are a few reasons why the Savior taught in this manner. He taught what the Father had taught Him and had commanded Him to teach from before this world. The *General Handbook* states, “His central purpose was doing the will of His Heavenly Father and helping others understand and live His gospel.”¹⁰ It just makes sense that He would repeat those lessons. In today’s vernacular, we would say that He was “staying on point.” He knew that it would be easier for the multitude then—and for us now—to hear these key points of doctrine multiple times so they could understand and receive revelation and spiritual confirmation “line upon line, precept upon precept.”¹¹

Elder David A. Bednar has taught, “Repetition is a vehicle through which the Holy Ghost can enlighten our minds, influence our hearts, and enlarge our understanding.”¹²

I have a saying displayed on my desk: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!”¹³ The “main thing” to the Savior is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of [each one of us].”¹⁴ He never tires of teaching and reteaching the doctrine and principles that lead to eternal life. And neither should we!

Those are just three of the myriad leadership lessons to be gleaned from a single day with the Savior. I invite you to study Christ’s leadership during His visit to the Nephites to bless you and to guide you as you prayerfully seek to develop your leadership vision, style, and abilities.

So here we are, two thousand years later, and Christ’s leadership lessons have truly stood the test of time. I recently received a leadership best practices article from the *Harvard Business Review* entitled “What Amazing Bosses Do Differently.”¹⁵ On the list are the following:

- “Manage individuals, not teams. . . . It’s easy to forget that employees are unique individuals, with varying interests, abilities, goals, and styles of learning. But it’s important to customize your interactions with them.”¹⁶

Well, to me, this sounds a lot like ministering one by one, as the Savior did.

- “Go big on meaning. . . . Articulate a clear purpose that fires your team up, set expectations high, and convey to the group that you think they’re capable of virtually anything.”¹⁷ Think of the Savior, who—after clearly teaching the Nephites what He had taught during His earthly ministry—promised that if they remembered and did what He taught, He would raise them up in the last day.¹⁸ That’s going big on meaning.
- “Don’t just talk . . . listen.”¹⁹ The best leaders spend a lot of time listening with their ears, their eyes, their hearts, and their minds. The Savior set this example, as recounted in 3 Nephi 17:

I perceive that ye are weak, that ye cannot understand all my words which I am commanded of the Father to speak unto you at this time. . . .

*And it came to pass that when Jesus had thus spoken, he cast his eyes round about again on the multitude, and beheld they were in tears, and did look steadfastly upon him as if they would ask him to tarry a little longer with them.*²⁰

The Savior discerned that the multitude was at its spiritual and emotional limits and let that sink into His heart. Then He pivoted, based on that “listening,” to heal the sick and to bless the little children. Leaders listen with eyes to see and ears to hear while discerning needs and listening to the Holy Ghost.

What Did Jesus Do?

Now, let’s move from universal leadership principles to *ecclesiastical leadership principles* and learn from what the Savior did during His visit. Time won’t permit an exhaustive recap of all that He did. I have already shared some of these things, but here are five key actions:

1. **Testify.** After the Father testified of Him, Jesus Christ testified of the Father and of His own role as Savior.²¹ Church leaders always take every opportunity to testify of the Savior in both word and deed. They never miss an opportunity to

testify of the hope found in Christ and through His infinite Atonement.

2. **Minister to the one.** As mentioned earlier, there were four times on that first day that the Lord ministered to individuals one by one.²² The doctrine of Christ exists to save all of covenant Israel collectively, but it starts individually, with the one.

3. **Invite to act.** The Savior invited the people to act on what He taught. In 3 Nephi 11, He said, “Therefore, go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken, unto the ends of the earth.”²³ Leaders always extend inspired invitations and then promise inspired blessings.

4. **Pray.** The Savior prayed for the people, and this brought joy.²⁴ Praying for others and letting them know that you are praying for them brings joy, comfort, and increased love. Remember this, please, in every situation, but particularly in your families.

5. **Leave!** Leaders know when to leave to allow their people to absorb what they have learned and to apply it.²⁵ It is a manifestation of the confidence that leaders have in their people if they can avoid micromanaging and allow others to grow. It is a great blessing to turn your people to the Lord and then leave and rejoice in their success.

What Did Jesus Teach?

In addition to studying what He did, it is also fascinating to see what the Savior chose to teach and how He focused His teachings on what matters most.

He taught the importance of priesthood ordinances and sacred covenants. Right away He taught of priesthood authority, baptism, the sacrament, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. He knew how important it was that the people yoke themselves to Him through making and keeping sacred covenants so they could have the power of godliness in their lives. And it is no different for us today.

Christ taught that “the spirit of contention . . . is of the devil.”²⁶ Not surprisingly, the adversary wants to confuse and to foment contention, particularly related to the ordinances, to keep us from binding ourselves to Christ through sacred covenants. The Savior was very direct in His teaching to avoid contention to ensure unity.

He taught pure doctrine—specifically, the doctrine of Christ and how to come unto Him and build our lives on Him so that we will prevail over this world.

The Savior taught hard truths about discipleship. He promised the soul-soothing blessings of the Beatitudes,²⁷ but He also spoke of the challenging path of discipleship. For example, He taught that “thou shalt not commit adultery” also encompasses not looking lustfully on another.²⁸ Discipleship is not easy or fast, but it leads to the most precious gift of all: that of eternal life as families with our Heavenly Father. Surely, enduring to the end of this path is worth the journey.²⁹

He taught of the gathering of Israel and of the need to minister constantly without being judgmental to help in that gathering.³⁰

I truly believe that He taught then on that beautiful day what He would teach us today. Think about President Russell M. Nelson. Where has his focus been? What has he taught? Well, from day one he has spoken about keeping the end in mind through entering and staying on the covenant path by making and keeping sacred covenants. He has spoken consistently of gathering Israel,³¹ ministering in a higher and holier way,³² seeking pure doctrine,³³ increasing unity,³⁴ developing a do-and-be-better discipleship,³⁵ and letting God prevail in our lives.³⁶ And, most recently, he has spoken about finding rest in the Lord.³⁷

You can see how President Nelson has followed the Savior’s leadership and teachings in these latter days in his talks and with each new announcement that he makes.

Jesus Christ is the Great Leader. He is the Master Teacher. His loving example of leading and teaching transcends more than just an ecclesiastical application. His leadership lessons will help you be a better spouse, parent, coach, supervisor, friend, employee, teammate, financial planner, missionary, neurosurgeon, or any other role that gives you the opportunity to interact with and lift others. Follow Him. Lead like He leads. Bless as He blesses. Lift as He lifts. Love as He loves.

I testify of Him. I testify that He lives. He is our Great Master and Teacher. The Great Leader and Follower. The Way. Jesus Christ, our Savior. As we follow Him, He will endow us with power,

and we will lead in light and love. He lives, and I express my love for Him as I express my deep love and admiration for each one of you. And I do so in His holy name, Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Howard W. Hunter, *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter: Fourteenth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 122.
2. 3 Nephi 11:15.
3. See 3 Nephi 17:9.
4. 3 Nephi 17:21.
5. See 3 Nephi 18:36.
6. See 3 Nephi 11:22.
7. 3 Nephi 12:1.
8. Gordon B. Hinckley, “How to Be a Teacher When Your Role as a Leader Requires You to Teach,” General Authority Priesthood Board meeting, 5 February 1969; quoted by Jeffrey R. Holland, “A Teacher Come from God,” *Ensign*, May 1998.
9. See 3 Nephi 11:21–41.
10. “Principles of Leadership in the Church,” *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, July 2021 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ, 2021), 4.2 (p. 34); see John 5:30; Mosiah 15:7.
11. 2 Nephi 28:30; Doctrine and Covenants 98:12.
12. David A. Bednar, “Repeat Over Again . . . the Same Things as Before,” BYU–Idaho devotional address, 26 January 2016.
13. Stephen R. Covey; for example, section 2 of Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First: To Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).
14. Moses 1:39.
15. See Sydney Finkelstein, “What Amazing Bosses Do Differently,” *Managing People*, *Harvard Business Review*, hbr.org, 27 November 2015.
16. Finkelstein, “What Amazing Bosses Do Differently.”

17. Finkelstein, “What Amazing Bosses Do Differently.”
18. See 3 Nephi 15:1.
19. Finkelstein, “What Amazing Bosses Do Differently.”
20. 3 Nephi 17:2, 5; emphasis added.
21. See 3 Nephi 11:7, 10–11.
22. See 3 Nephi 11:14–15; 17:9, 21; 18:36.
23. 3 Nephi 11:41.
24. See 3 Nephi 17:15–18; see also 11:17.
25. See 3 Nephi 18:39.
26. 3 Nephi 11:29.
27. See Matthew 5:3–12; Luke 6:20–23.
28. Matthew 5:27; see also verse 28. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, one of the most relentlessly positive individuals on the face of the earth, cautions:

*Obviously as the path of discipleship ascends, that trail gets ever more narrow until we come to that knee-buckling . . . sermon . . . : “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” [Matthew 5:48]. [“An Ensign to the Nations,” *Ensign*, May 2011]*

29. See Jeffrey R. Holland, *Our Day Star Rising: Exploring the New Testament with Jeffrey R. Holland* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022).
30. See 3 Nephi 16:5; 18:32.
31. See Russell M. Nelson, in Russell M. Nelson and Wendy W. Nelson, “Hope of Israel,” worldwide youth devotional, 3 June 2018.
32. See Russell M. Nelson, “Ministering,” *Ensign*, May 2018.
33. See Russell M. Nelson, “Pure Truth, Pure Doctrine, and Pure Revelation,” *Liahona*, November 2021.
34. See Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022.
35. See Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” *Ensign*, May 2019.
36. See Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign*, November 2020.
37. See Russell M. Nelson, “Overcome the World and Find Rest,” *Liahona*, November 2022.