

Teaching Journal

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REL 471

Winter 2026

Week 2: January 21, 2026

Theme: Teaching Success and Christlike Teaching

This week pushed me to rethink what teaching success really means. I have often been tempted to measure a lesson by what happens in the moment: whether students respond quickly, whether the discussion feels lively, or whether something emotional happens in the room. But this week made me step back and see that gospel teaching is not supposed to be measured by immediate reactions alone. Real success is quieter, slower, and much more sacred than that. It looks like helping students become devoted disciples of Jesus Christ over time. That changes everything. It means I cannot be satisfied with a lesson that feels good but leaves no lasting spiritual effect.

That idea also exposed a weakness in me. When I feel unsure of myself, it is easy to lean on stories, sentiment, or polished commentary to carry the lesson. This week reminded me that superficial teaching may hold attention for a moment, but it will not nourish a soul. The gospel has more weight than that. If I want to teach the way the Savior teaches, then I have to care more about hearts than appearances, and more about conversion than performance. That requires seeing students the way He sees them, not merely noticing their current behavior, confidence level, or outward responses. It means paying attention to their lives, their learning, their struggles, and the small clues they give about what they need spiritually.

I was especially struck by the importance of love in teaching. Love is not a vague feeling in the background. It has to show up in the way I speak, the way I listen, the way I respond, and the way I pray. Praying for students by name stood out to me because it shifts my heart toward them and invites divine help. It reminds me that teaching is not about managing a room or delivering material. It is about ministering to people. The teacher I have been has often focused on clarity and preparation. The teacher I am becoming wants those things to remain, but under the deeper aim of helping students come unto Christ in a lasting way.

Week 3: January 28, 2026

Theme: Teaching Christ-Centered Lessons

This week sharpened one of the most important lessons of the semester for me: Jesus Christ cannot be added at the end of a lesson like a polite conclusion. If the gospel is His, then He has to be present from the first question to the final amen. That truth hit me harder than I expected because I can look back and see times when I taught a story, a principle, or a commandment well enough, but still let the Savior become the summary instead of the center. That is not the same thing as truly teaching Christ.

What changed for me this week was not just the idea itself, but the way it affects preparation. I found myself asking different questions than I usually do. Instead of asking only what a passage teaches about obedience or courage, I began asking what it reveals about the Savior's character, His redeeming work, and the kind of trust He is inviting from the learner. That shift feels small on paper, but it changes the whole spirit of a lesson. It takes scripture out of the category of moral examples and returns it to its rightful purpose: to build faith in Jesus Christ.

I also thought about how this affects the way commandments are taught. If I teach a commandment only as a standard to keep, the lesson can quietly become about rule-keeping. But if I teach what that commandment reveals about the Lord who gave it, then the lesson becomes relational rather than merely behavioral. That matters to me. I do not want students to feel as if discipleship is only a checklist. I want them to understand that covenants and commandments are part of knowing and trusting Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ more fully. This week raised the standard for me. The teacher I am becoming needs to prepare every lesson with the question, "How does this help them know Him better?" If I lose that, I lose the center.

Week 4: February 4, 2026

Theme: Connecting Doctrine to Students' Lives

This week helped me think more carefully about what relevance in teaching actually means. I do not want relevance to become a code word for entertainment, novelty, or trying too hard to sound modern. Relevance, at its best, means helping students see that eternal doctrine speaks directly to their actual questions, fears, decisions, and pressures. As I studied the Savior's teaching, I noticed again that He consistently spoke into people's lived realities. He did not teach truth in a vacuum. He taught people where they were.

Working on the Noah material made this especially concrete for me. Noah's story can feel distant if it is taught only as an ancient event. But when I started thinking about the pressures teenagers face now, social pressure, anxiety, uncertainty, distraction, and the fear of standing alone, the story became much more immediate. Noah obeyed before he could see the storm. That is not just an old story. That is discipleship. Students live in a world where many of the Lord's warnings and invitations require faith before visible evidence. That is why the image of the ark stood out so strongly to me this week. Obedience is not about control. It is about protection and preparation before the flood starts.

I also appreciated how this week pushed me to think about what students already know from their own experience. Many young people already understand what it feels like to choose something right and feel awkward for it. They know what pressure feels like. They know what it means to regret ignoring wise counsel. Good teaching does not ignore those lived experiences. It brings doctrine close enough that students can see their own lives inside the lesson. The teacher I am becoming wants to ask better questions about the real world students are living in. I want them to feel that the gospel is not just true in theory, but reliable in the middle of their actual lives.

Week 5: February 11, 2026

Theme: Cultivating Love, Respect, and Purpose in the Classroom

This week made me think much more seriously about the atmosphere of a classroom. Students know very quickly whether a room feels safe, welcoming, and steady. They may never say it directly, but they feel it. That matters because gospel teaching depends on more than content. It depends on whether hearts feel safe enough to open. The idea of a classroom as a refuge stayed with me all week. That word feels right to me. A good classroom is not casual or directionless, but it should feel like a place where students can try, speak, wonder, and learn without fear of embarrassment.

I was especially affected by the reminder that Christ does not sort people the way the world does. He does not give preference to the polished, the articulate, or the naturally confident. That convicted me a little. It is too easy to respond more warmly or more quickly to students who make teaching feel easy. But if I want to teach in a way that invites the Spirit, then I have to learn to honor all sincere effort, not just strong performance. Respect is not just classroom manners. It is a spiritual discipline. It looks like listening carefully, thanking imperfect responses, and never making students feel punished for trying.

Purpose matters just as much as love and respect. A warm room without spiritual direction is not enough. The purpose of the classroom is still to help learners come unto Jesus Christ. That purpose gives shape to everything else. It influences how I ask questions, how I redirect, how I respond, and even how I prepare. This week helped me see that teaching is not just about presenting a good lesson. It is about creating conditions where students feel loved enough, respected enough, and spiritually safe enough to actually hear the Lord. That is a weighty responsibility, but it is also a hopeful one.

Week 6: February 18, 2026*Theme: Teaching Through Questions and Student Participation*

This week changed the way I think about questions. I already knew questions mattered, but I think I had still been treating them mostly as tools to keep a lesson moving or to check whether students were paying attention. This week made it much clearer that questions can do far more than that. Good questions do not simply test recall. They invite discovery. They create space for the Spirit to teach. They help students search, analyze, apply, and bear testimony rather than just sit there and wait for the teacher to do all the work.

One of the most helpful things for me was seeing how much the wording of a question matters. A shallow question often gets a shallow answer. But a thoughtful question can draw students into the doctrine in a way that lecture alone usually cannot. I appreciated the framework of search questions, analysis questions, application questions, and testimony questions because it gave me a more deliberate pattern for planning. That pattern helps me teach toward growth instead of just toward coverage. It also puts more responsibility on the learner, which is exactly where it should be.

This week also exposed how uncomfortable I still am with silence. When I ask a question and no one answers right away, I feel the urge to rush in and rescue the moment. But I am beginning to see that silence is not always failure. Sometimes it is the space where people are actually thinking, feeling, and listening. If I interrupt that too quickly, I may be stepping in front of what the Spirit is trying to do. That was humbling to admit. The teacher I am becoming needs to trust the process more. I want to ask better questions, give students time to respond, and build a classroom where participation feels meaningful instead of forced.

Week 7: February 25, 2026

Theme: Helping Students Set and Accomplish Righteous Goals

This week reframed goal-setting for me in a way that felt much more doctrinal than I expected. I often think of goals in practical terms, things to improve, things to accomplish, habits to build. But studying the Lord's work through the scriptures helped me see that righteous goals are part of discipleship. Heavenly Father works with purpose. He prepares, organizes, creates, fills, and moves things forward with order and patience. That pattern matters. It means that setting righteous goals is not just self-improvement with church language added to it. It is one way we participate in His work with intention.

I loved the visual of looking at future goals with "The Lord" written above them. That image stayed with me because it corrects something I tend to do. I often set goals and then ask the Lord to bless them, instead of involving Him from the beginning as the guide, source, and sustaining power behind them. This week reminded me that righteous goals should be prayerful, recorded, acted on in faith, and then reviewed honestly. That pattern is simple, but it is also demanding. It requires humility, patience, and willingness to adjust.

It also made me think about what students need. Many young people want direction but do not always know how to begin. Teaching them to involve the Lord in a specific goal, rather than just hoping things improve someday, feels deeply worthwhile. I do not want to teach students to chase perfectionism or measure themselves harshly. I want to help them learn how to move forward with the Lord, one step at a time, in a way that is hopeful and faithful. The teacher I am becoming sees goals less as pressure and more as guided growth.

Week 8: March 3, 2026*Theme: Finding Jesus Christ in the Scriptures*

This week deepened something the semester has been building all along: the need to help students find Jesus Christ in the scriptures, not just lessons about the gospel. I can see now how easy it is to teach scripture correctly and still miss its center if I am not aiming directly at the Savior. That image of hitting the bullseye on the wrong target really stayed with me. In scripture study, it is possible to notice interesting details, themes, and lessons and still miss the Person the whole text is meant to reveal.

I appreciated the practical approach this week gave me. Looking for symbols of Jesus Christ, looking for what He does, and looking for what His actions teach us about His character gives students a clear way to study. I especially loved the contrast between Christ as living water and Christ in the fire. Those two images capture so much of what students need. Sometimes they need Him as the One who sustains and fills. Sometimes they need Him as the One who stays with them in the trial He does not remove right away. Both are true.

My study of John 20 and 21 deepened this even more. Mary Magdalene's experience in particular has stayed with me. She was close to the truth before she recognized it. She stood near the risen Christ and still did not know it was Him until He spoke her name. That scene taught me something important about teaching. Proximity is not the same as perception. Students can sit in the right room, hear true doctrine, and still miss what matters most if they are not helped to recognize Him. The teacher I am becoming wants to prepare lessons that do more than explain. I want them to help students turn, look, and see the Savior more clearly.

Week 9: March 10, 2026*Theme: Inviting Diligent Learning and Student Responsibility*

This week clarified the relationship between teaching and learning in a way that felt both corrective and freeing. I think I have often carried too much of the burden on myself. I tend to assume that if I explain clearly enough, organize well enough, and say the right things, then learning will happen. But this week reminded me that the Savior does not treat disciples as passive receivers of information. He invites them to act. He asks, commands, calls, and expects movement. Real learning in the gospel is participatory.

Abraham stood out to me because his example begins with desire. He wanted greater knowledge, greater righteousness, and greater blessings. That matters because diligent learning begins long before a teacher asks a question. It begins with what the learner wants and whether he or she is willing to seek. That helped me see my role differently. I cannot manufacture hunger for truth in someone else, but I can create conditions where that hunger is honored, invited, and strengthened. I can teach in a way that gives students room to ask, search, write, reflect, and respond instead of simply receiving content from me.

I also appreciated the reminder that the Lord often requires us to bring effort before He gives greater light. He does not do our spiritual work for us. That is not neglect. It is part of our growth. This week challenged me to stop thinking of participation as an optional classroom bonus. It is part of how conversion happens. The teacher I am becoming wants to build lessons where students are expected to engage with scripture, think carefully, and act on what they are learning. That kind of learning asks more of everyone, but it also leads somewhere real.

Week 10: March 17, 2026

Theme: Seeking Answers with Faith in Christ

This week invited me to think more deeply about how difficult questions should be approached. I appreciated the reminder that faithful seeking begins with Jesus Christ, not with the question itself. That may sound simple, but it changes the tone of everything. A person can approach a question with suspicion, pride, fear, or faith, and those starting points matter. Beginning with Christ does not erase complexity or instantly solve uncertainty, but it places the whole search inside a relationship of trust rather than inside argument or panic.

The distinction between primary and secondary questions was especially helpful to me. If the deepest things are settled, that God is our Father, that Jesus is the Christ, that He lives, and that He speaks, then other questions, though still real and sometimes painful, do not have to dismantle everything. That does not mean dismissing hard things. It means keeping them in the right order. I needed that reminder for myself, and I also needed it as a future teacher. Students do not need false certainty from me. They need honesty, patience, and a model of how to seek without losing their footing in Christ.

I was also struck by the importance of trustworthy sources and patient relationships. Questions are often tender. They are not problems to be crushed quickly with a correct answer. Often people need to be heard before they can be helped. This week made me want to become the kind of teacher who does not react defensively to hard questions, but who responds with both truth and kindness. The teacher I am becoming wants to help students seek faithfully, think clearly, and stay close to the Lord even when answers come gradually.

Week 11: March 24, 2026*Theme: Preparing Students for Real-Life Challenges*

This week reminded me that gospel teaching has to meet real life honestly. Students are not just dealing with doctrines in the abstract. They are dealing with sadness, pressure, procrastination, mental strain, identity questions, educational decisions, and uncertainty about the future. I appreciated that the life preparation material did not move away from the gospel in order to address those things. Instead, it showed how deeply those issues belong inside a Christ-centered approach to teaching. That felt important to me because it kept the solution grounded in the Savior rather than in generic advice.

What stood out most to me was the reminder that faithful living does not guarantee immediate visible outcomes. Effort does not always produce the result we hoped for, and obedience does not remove hardship. That is a deeply important thing for students to learn before life teaches it to them painfully. I thought a lot this week about what it means to prosper in the Lord. Scripture does not teach that prosperity always looks like ease, success, or quick reward. More often, it looks like strength in difficulty, direction in uncertainty, and growth through affliction.

That truth matters because students need a faith that can survive real life. I do not want to present discipleship as if it always leads to clean, immediate results. I want students to know that Christ strengthens people in the middle of difficulty and that faithfulness matters even when outcomes are disappointing. The teacher I am becoming wants to teach with more realism and more hope at the same time. That combination feels honest, and it feels closer to the way the Lord actually works with His children.

Final Reflection: March 31, 2026

Theme: The Teacher I Am Becoming

As I look back over this semester, I can see that this course changed more than my teaching methods. It changed the way I think about what teaching is for. I came into the class assuming I needed better polish, stronger structure, and more confidence in front of a group. I still value those things, but I do not see them as the center anymore. Over the course of the semester, the Lord has kept redirecting me to a deeper question: does my teaching help people come unto Jesus Christ? That question has become a kind of measuring line for everything else.

One of the biggest changes in me is the way I now think about the relationship between teaching and love. The Savior's pattern in scripture is precise, patient, and deeply personal. He asks purposeful questions. He creates experiences. He meets people in grief, fear, doubt, and failure without humiliating them. That matters to me because I can see how often my own nervousness tempts me toward performance. I want to explain everything well, keep control of the room, and avoid awkwardness. But Christlike teaching asks for something better than control. It asks for charity, spiritual sensitivity, and enough humility to let the Holy Ghost do the real teaching.

This class has also helped me stop measuring lessons only by how clearly I explained something. That was one of my old standards. If the lesson made sense and felt organized, I thought I had succeeded. Now I see that clarity is not enough by itself. A lesson can be orderly and still miss its deepest purpose. The Savior teaches in a way that helps people recognize Him, trust Him, and respond. That is a much holier standard, and it has changed how I prepare and how I reflect afterward.

I also feel more aware now that teaching is not just about delivering doctrine. It is about creating conditions where people can learn from the Spirit. That means I need to ask better questions, allow more silence, listen more closely, and pay more attention to the people in front of me. It means trusting student agency instead of trying to carry the whole lesson myself. It means building classrooms marked by love, respect, purpose, and Christ-centered focus.

The teacher I am becoming is not more impressive than the teacher I was before. But I hope I am becoming more faithful. I want to be more centered on Jesus Christ, more trusting of the Holy Ghost, more respectful of student responsibility, and more willing to teach with patience and charity. I still see my weaknesses. But I also see more clearly now what kind of teacher the Lord is asking me to become, and for the first time I feel like I understand why that matters so much.