

*“Teaching Teens to Understand How the Atonement Can Help Daily”*

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I am excited to share with you what I have learned in preparing for this opportunity. We all need the power of the Atonement in our lives. I do not pretend to fully comprehend this immeasurable gift, nor its all-encompassing application. I do not know everything, but I know enough to trust in the Lord. I know help is available, and I know where to find it. And this is exactly what our teens need to know to understand and use the Atonement in their lives.

And now that I have studied and thought about it more seriously and with a deadline, I feel like I have a lot of help. I knew some of this before, but I have learned so much. Now I have definitive resources and counsel in my hand to take into my life and put to work. I am very grateful for this blessing.

When we think about the Atonement, we usually think about our mistakes and shortcomings. We think of our need to repent. We know we are not perfect. We are keenly aware of our own lack, and sometimes we struggle with the same exact transgressions over and over again. We can be forgetful. We sometimes are slow to change. We are stubborn. And wait a minute—am I describing *us*? That sounds like our teenagers! Let’s be honest. We are talking about all of us.

The most powerful way we can teach our teens is through our example. We need to be genuine and charitable. We must be accepting and loving. If you live it, you don’t have to preach it.

So when I say “we,” it applies to our teens and to us, because we have to lead by example. We have to understand the Atonement and be making changes in our lives to reflect that understanding, to have any hope of teaching our teens to do it. Nothing will change until we change!

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said to this point, “The atonement of Christ is the most basic and fundamental doctrine of the gospel, and it is the least understood of all our revealed truths. Many of us have a superficial knowledge and rely upon the Lord and His goodness to see us through the trials and perils of life. But if we are to have faith like that of Enoch and Elijah, we must believe what they believed, know what they knew, and live as they lived.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the tender mercies of our loving Heavenly Father is that we are not required to have a perfect knowledge of all that the Atonement entails to be blessed by the power of this great sacrifice and service given to all mankind through our Savior, Jesus Christ. This does not absolve us of the responsibility to pursue a greater understanding of it. We should study it, meditate on it, plead for forgiveness through it, and let go of heartache and injustices to make room for peace and love, balm and healing, all the days of our life. As we do this, our teens will learn of the power of the Atonement through us. They will witness charity instead of revenge. They will learn to love instead of hate. They will grow to understand and look for good instead of acting with fear about differences and misunderstandings. Our meekness will shine bright like the sun to show them the way. We really do have power for good to influence and shape the choices that are made by our loved ones when we lead out and love, forgive and forget.

We cannot hope to teach with power something we barely understand.

Doctrine and Covenants 11:21: “Seek not to declare my word, but first seek to obtain my word, and then shall your tongue be loosed; then, if you desire, you shall have my Spirit and my word, yea, the power of God unto the convincing of men.”

This counsel was not only for the newly called disciples in the time of the restoration of truth to the world through the Prophet Joseph Smith. It is not only for missionaries who have chosen to join the forces that will bring the truth to the ends of the earth. It has direct application for parents and leaders of youth who love the Lord and who love their children. It is counsel to prepare for a time of need.

A serious study of the Atonement could not help but naturally lead us to become better people. A deeper understanding leads to changes in behavior as the Spirit works on our hearts and minds. Our discipleship will radiate love and light proportionally to our conversion. We will become more Christlike and develop the attributes He has, like love, patience, meekness, and temperance. And we will even become “easy to be entreated”<sup>2</sup>—approachable to our teens.

Then when opportunities to teach come, you will be ready and they will be more likely to listen. Can you imagine it?

If we could just let love dictate our words and thoughts, our reactions and responses, we would live in a way that would let the power of God shine through us to teach truth and give hope. Nothing we do will be of greater service in the building of the kingdom. Not only will we know what to teach, we will have the power and help from heaven through the Spirit to carry the message to their hearts.

In this way, we safeguard our children and set them on a foundation of truth. We arm them with all the tools and all the help available from heaven to secure for themselves their own potential to become what God would wish for them. That is what I want!

So we start with ourselves. This is not what I thought I would be speaking about when I began preparing for this assignment, but it came so clearly as I studied. It makes sense that if we are to be effective in reaching out to anyone else to offer help, we must have our feet securely under us. Right? Then we can teach.

One of the blessings of the Atonement is repentance. Don't assume that just because your teenagers have gone to church for 16 years that they fully understand the process of repentance. They may even be able to tell you the words, but that does not always mean they know how to apply them. The best thing you can do is to teach them about the Atonement with your words, and then reteach them with your actions. If you make a mistake, hurt their feelings, get caught in a lie or whatever, admit you were wrong. Make it right. Model humility for them. And they will learn by watching you that you truly believe what you are trying to help them understand. Be careful not to belittle them if they come to you to ask questions. Talk and listen. They are smart. They are thinkers. They sometimes test the waters on unrelated issues to gauge if it will be safe to come to us with serious questions. No interaction is meaningless. Be watchful and loving.

Use the new curriculum for youth, *Come, Follow Me*, to plan your family home evening lessons. There are sections specifically about the Atonement. Use the videos the Church has made to supplement the lessons. Check in with them to see how you can help with Personal Progress or Duty to God. Be more involved. Be helpful when things seem good, and you will have a place in their lives if things get hard.

We have a tendency to think it is our right as parents, teachers, or leaders to control them—to govern them to ensure they choose what we think is right. We have more experience. We are older. We are wiser. But agency is the true wonder and gift of this life, and while the responsibility to teach and provide for them is squarely fit on our shoulders, the manner of teaching we employ will make all the difference in how they respond.

We would do well to realize that our responsibility is one that is more stewardship than ownership. Think with me about Proverbs 22:6, which says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Now the hope is that they will not ever depart from it and that our love will be enough to tether them to the safety of the gospel—but we must realize it is God's love that does that. If we can help them know for themselves that God loves them—by our example, faith, and testimony, and by helping them have their own experiences of growth in the gospel—they may spare themselves much grief. This scripture does not say that the winds and the storms of life will not have any effect on them. It does not promise ease or perfection. It is a statement of love and encouragement that if we do our job of teaching truth and testifying from the beginning of our time with them, they will be blessed with power to find it for themselves if they choose it.

They may depart for a time. We may have years of heartache as we watch them learn through mistakes. But the truth will not be hidden, and when they come to themselves and soften to the possibility that they are truly worthy of God's love, they will find it again.

Now we live in a day of wonder. We have information technology that makes life very easy and gives us answers instantly. We can communicate across the globe effortlessly. Patience truly is a virtue in our day. We must teach that work is required to get answers from heaven. And patience and endurance are part of that.

Think about how different the world is today than when you were a teen. Good and evil are still at war. The lines are blurred a bit more, and filth is more accessible than ever. It is no longer hidden in the out-of-the-way places, although it still can be found there. If you watch television, go to a PG movie, walk through the mall, or surf the Internet, you will encounter pornography at some point. It is not a matter of if, but when. And the difference between good and evil winning is all in our choices when we encounter it.

Use the story of David from the Bible to teach them not to make the same mistake. His error was to linger when he found that the view included more than he expected, and then also he made the mistake of pursuing it further. Contrast this story with that of Joseph of Egypt, who had every opportunity to have what was not his. His rejection of Potiphar's wife is an example of faith, chastity, and personal integrity.<sup>3</sup> We should do everything we can to protect them. They know what is right. We must teach our kids that we expect them to choose right, to get out, to look away, to take a stand, to walk out, to act with courage.

If your child has been exposed and didn't get out, the door is not shut to him or her. We need to be the ones who help them to know that. It is harder to fight alone than with help. Satan tries to isolate us. Be help. Get help. Your bishop can become their truest ally and greatest champion to help them overcome and to help them understand the process of repentance. Do everything you can to protect them. Then do everything you can to show you love them. It is never too late to start over.

There is a sentence that is repeated in 2 Nephi in the Book of Mormon, quoting the words of Isaiah that give me hope on this point. It is, "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still."<sup>4</sup> There will be work to do. Repentance includes restitution and recovery. But the Lord does not give up on us. His hand is stretched out still. No matter how hopeless we feel, He is the one who can lead us back. And he does it through love.

Love should be our watchword. If your kid lies to you (and all kids do at some point), it is part of how we learn the difference between what is true and what is not true. It is how we learn that telling the truth and being honest matters. If you come down on him like a crazy person in anger and punish him to teach him a lesson, a couple of things might happen: He may never lie again, or he may never come clean to you again. And that is an interesting phrase, to come clean. It means to give full disclosure, and in a gospel light it means to be right with God, to make things right.

What do you want the outcome to be? I want them to learn that telling the truth defines their character. I want them to want to tell the truth. I want them to learn from mistakes and to know that I expect them to do their best—not to be perfect, but striving to be better. I want them to learn that peace and happiness come with honesty, and I want them to learn this by feeling the difference when they make the choice. And I want them to feel and recognize the guilty feelings that prompt action when they make a mistake.

If I get angry, I give them a target of transference. This means they will cover their God-given guilty feelings with anger for me because they felt belittled. No one likes to get in trouble. The Holy Spirit is not easily felt or heard over yelling. If I don't get angry or treat them with anger,

logic is left to rule, and they are more likely to learn from it because I did not confuse the issue with another issue—meaning the question of their self-worth. The consequences inevitably come. Think about recognizing their courage if they initiate a confession or ask for help. All of us have the light of Christ in us to help us see right from wrong. All of us. We know deep down. What we need is support, not lecturing. It is OK to express disappointment in their actions, but be sure to express your love too.

Jesus taught self-worth in every miracle and in every instance of forgiveness. This is a pattern we should follow. When He forgives, He puts his hand out and lifts us. He doesn't berate us or belittle us. He is our Savior and friend.

Our teens will be greatly affected in the way they feel about Heavenly Father by our reaction to their mistakes. We need to be charitable and loving. Condemn the sin, not the sinner. Love the sinner, because one thing is for sure: No amount of lecturing or nagging will ever motivate true change. It might dissuade them from doing something when they are around you, but that is all you can hope for. Something I have learned is that my job is to love them. God's job is to change them.

Of course this is not meant to minimize in any way the importance of teaching truth in word and deed and then clearly helping them see the connection between their choices and the consequences. My job is also to pray for them endlessly, that they might have a change of heart, that they might know the sweetness of God's love for them and desire it evermore.

Another aspect of the Atonement is the power to extend forgiveness when we are wronged. In *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service*, we are taught, "All that is unfair about life can be made right through the Atonement of Jesus Christ."<sup>5</sup>

Think back on junior high and high school. Even if you had a lot of things going for you, there were days when friends were mean, teachers were unreasonable, and parents were impossible. Be careful not to minimize someone else's heartache. These things might seem trivial, but it is their whole life right now. We can teach them to forgive and let go if we are sympathetic and we listen with compassion. The Savior suffered all of the pains and injustices of our mortal experience. The Atonement gives us power to overcome all—even things that we have no fault in.

Remember the story shared in general conference last fall about Corrie ten Boom. She was interned in a concentration camp during World War II. While speaking in public about her experiences of healing and forgiveness, she met a former Nazi guard. The guard was very touched and grateful for her message, as he was desperate to overcome his horrible misdeeds. He reached out his hand to her. She felt it was impossible to accept his token of gratitude. Her hand remained at her side while she prayed silently, "Lord Jesus, forgive me and help me to forgive him." Nothing happened. She offered another prayer as the anger boiled inside her for the atrocities that she knew he was guilty of. "Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness."

She said, “As I took his hand, the most incredible thing happened . . . a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. . . . When [the Savior] tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”<sup>6</sup>

Lewis B. Smedes was a renowned Christian author and a professor of theology and ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He said: “When we forgive evil we do not excuse it, we do not tolerate it, we do not smother it. We look the evil full in the face, call it what it is, let its horror shock and stun and enrage us, and only then do we forgive it.”<sup>7</sup>

He also said, “To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.”<sup>8</sup>

The Savior can speed healing along with his comfort, and He can replace anguish with peace if we will turn it over to Him with fervent prayer and earnest faith.

There is only one source of peace that takes feelings of betrayal and replaces them with love, and that is our Savior Jesus Christ. If we will let go and ask Him in prayer, He will heal us. His arms of mercy are extended to us and waiting to encircle us in safety and love. Feeling that love straight from heaven makes everything OK. When you know you are accepted by the Lord, the troubles and turmoil of this life shrink, and your power to endure becomes more than sufficient. We need to teach our teens this truth as we comfort them.

Now I want to share what I am most excited about. Have you ever learned about something on just enough of a deeper level that it made it like you never knew it before? I did not realize that the power of the Atonement extended beyond repentance and forgiveness. I knew Jesus’s suffering included all of our misfortune, pain, physical and emotional ailments, and heartache. But I did not know why. I do now.

Elder David A. Bednar’s talk from the April [2014] general conference titled “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease” is a fantastic resource. He taught this aspect of the Atonement with clarity and power. He said, “Not only does the Atonement of Jesus Christ overcome the effects of the Fall of Adam and make possible the remission of our individual sins and transgressions, but His Atonement also enables us to do good and become better in ways that stretch far beyond our mortal capacities. Most of us know that when we do things wrong and need help to overcome the effects of sin in our lives, the Savior has made it possible for us to become clean through His redeeming power. But do we also understand that the Atonement is for faithful men and women who are obedient, worthy, and conscientious and who are striving to become better and serve more faithfully? I wonder if we fail to fully acknowledge this strengthening aspect of the Atonement in our lives and mistakenly believe we must carry our load all alone—through sheer grit, willpower, and discipline and with our obviously limited capacities.”

I have read this passage many times, and I always feel the power of it. I know this is true. I am amazed that I could have grown up in the Church and not known this was a part of the Atonement. I am so grateful for it.

Jesus Christ in his wisdom can not only make us clean, but can also strengthen us to become more worthy, more faithful, more obedient. And it is done through the power of the Atonement. This is a blessing for the righteous. This is how we become sanctified, or made holy: through Him. We claim this blessing through obedience because of His grace. Teach your teens that choosing right empowers them!

Think of the parable of the mustard seed. When I was baptized, my mother gave me a necklace that had a mustard seed encapsulated in a little see-through heart. She told me the story from the Bible and encouraged me to have faith like the grain of a mustard seed. She shared with me the words from the scripture in Matthew 17:20 that said, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you.” I thought then that the faith referred to the size of the seed. But I do believe it has much more to do with the obedience of the seed to become what it is meant to be. Faith like a grain of mustard seed means to learn and then follow God’s will, allowing Him to make you greater than you could ever be on your own.

This is not new doctrine, but understanding it was new to me and might be new to you. Think of the story in the Book of Mormon in Mosiah, of Alma and his people who were persecuted by Amulon. They were to be put to death if they prayed. These people are good righteous people. The Lord says to them, “Lift up your heads and be of good comfort, for I know of the covenant which ye have made unto me; and I will covenant with my people and deliver them out of bondage.” He tells them he will strengthen them that their burdens seem light, which He does. “And now it came to pass that the burdens which were laid upon Alma and his brethren were made light; yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord.”<sup>9</sup>

Elder Bednar said. “It is one thing to know that Jesus Christ came to the earth to *die* for us. But we also need to appreciate that the Lord desires, through His Atonement and by the power of the Holy Ghost, to *enliven* us—not only to guide but also to strengthen and heal us.”<sup>10</sup>

I have been blessed by this strengthening through the Atonement even though I did not know that was how it was done. The Lord blesses us when we choose to do good. All the blessings we receive come to us through Jesus Christ. His infinite Atonement will not only redeem us from the Fall and from our sins, it will enliven us to become glorified and sanctified when we live to honor with integrity the covenants and ordinances of the Holy Priesthood.

Here are some practical ideas that can help you teach this aspect of the Atonement and prepare your teens to be in a position to receive the connected blessings.

- Point them toward the temple. Help them get a picture of their choice for their room. Go to open houses and dedications and talk to them. Answer their questions. Visit the grounds of working temples. Let them see the goal Heavenly Father wants for them.
- Give them their own scriptures and a journal for their study. Phones are OK for accessing the scriptures, but paper gives them a place to write the impressions that may come. Teach them to record their answers and sacred experiences. They can be easy to forget if not recorded.

- Give them their own conference *Ensign* to study. It is too hard to learn all the counsel in one sitting. I listen to the whole thing, but my kids just can't yet. So we alternate reading our scriptures and reading a talk from the conference report for our family scripture study. And we talk about it as we go.
- Teach them to how to study the scriptures. We are reading the Book of Mormon. We have read it before, so our goal is not to get to through it—the Book of Mormon is where we study. Our goal is to discuss the stories and gospel principles so they understand them. We look up footnotes now and read entries from the Bible Dictionary. Have a Bible out too, and look up the scriptures to clarify as needed. The Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ and contains the fulness of His gospel, but the language is sometimes hard to understand. The Bible can be helpful as a second witness, as with the other standard works, to clearly testify of the truth of all things.
- Help them set up an account on FamilySearch and LDS.org and help them find and rescue their ancestors. Elder Richard G. Scott has said, “Do you young people want a sure way to eliminate the influence of the adversary in your life? Immerse yourself in searching for your ancestors, prepare their names for the sacred vicarious ordinances available in the temple, and then go to the temple to stand as proxy for them to receive the ordinances of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. . . . I can think of no greater protection from the influence of the adversary in your life.”<sup>11</sup>

A few years ago, I was given a calling that I did not know if I could perform. My health was in question, but my heart wanted to accept. I struggled to reconcile the turmoil I felt. I prayed and counseled with people who were close to me. I continued my personal study and prayers as I tried to know what to do. Finally the answer I needed came to me through a quiet thought: “Butterflies were not meant to stay in a cocoon.” I knew this was my answer. I knew I could do it. I was strengthened and encouraged by this answer and was able to serve in the calling and to grow in my testimony and talents. I know now this strengthening was the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

We have experiences like this now and then. Sharing them with our teens can help them see what it takes to learn from heaven what God wants for us. It helps them see that He is mindful of us and loves us. And that knowledge gives to us the confidence to turn to Him for help. I know this is true. And I pray for you that your efforts will be blessed, that your loved ones will be open to this help and strength.

In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* [1985], xv.

<sup>2</sup> Alma 7:23.

<sup>3</sup> Guide to the Scriptures, “Joseph, Son of Jacob” ; scriptures.lds.org.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Nephi 19:12, 21; 20:4.

<sup>5</sup> *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* [2004], 52.



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<sup>6</sup> Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (1971), 215; quoted in Timothy J. Dyches, “Wilt Thou Be Made Whole?” *Ensign*, Nov. 2013, 39.

<sup>7</sup> “Louis B. Smedes > Quotes > Quotable Quote.” <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/267268-when-we-forgive-evil-we-do-not-excuse-it-we>, accessed Aug. 26, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis B. Smedes. BrainyQuote.com, Xplore Inc., 2015.  
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/l/lewisbsme135524.html>, accessed Aug. 26, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Mosiah 24:13–15.

<sup>10</sup> David A. Bednar, “Bear Up Their Burdens with Ease,” *Ensign*, May 2014.

<sup>11</sup> “The Joy of Redeeming the Dead,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2012.