

Summer of Sharing – Week 1

June 29, 2008

Impetus for the gospel sharing class was talk by Elder M. Russell Ballard at the October 2007 General Conference called “Faith, Family, Facts, and Fruits”. In it, he said:

“It is not easy to explain something as vast as the Church or as wonderful as the restored gospel to people who know little or nothing about us. Even questions on one specific aspect can be difficult to answer because every question seems to be connected to other questions. The most common request we hear is a fairly simple one that goes something like this: ‘Tell me a little about your Church.’ The key word here is ‘little.’ They are not saying, ‘Tell me everything you know and then send others to tell me everything else.’”

Question #1 for class: If someone said “tell me a little about your Church”, how would you respond?

Remind people to answer the question in a way that satisfies the request but also generates a follow-up question. Two sample responses would be:

- We’re a Christian faith with a deep and abiding love of Jesus Christ. In fact, we believe that Jesus Christ himself sits at the head of our Church. [Might prompt follow-up questions like: (1) I thought you weren’t Christian. Why is that?, (2) What do you mean when you say Jesus Christ is at the head of your Church?]
- My participation in the Church and my relationship with my Heavenly Father have made me a better person and has brought our family closer together. We believe that families can be together forever. [Might prompt follow-up questions like: (1) In what ways have you become a better person?, (2) In what ways has your family come closer together?, (3) What do you mean when you say your family can be together forever?]

Question #2 for class: What questions do you most frequently get asked about the Church?

After discussing question #2, include this quote from Elder Ballard’s talk and give people copies of the handouts with the points from his talk along with the Articles of Faith:

“We need to remember that there is a difference between interest and mere curiosity. Sometimes people just want to know what the Church is. Those who are curious in this general way deserve clear and accurate information that comes directly from those of us who are members so that they do not have to rely on the incomplete answers, half-truths, or false statements that may come from the media or other outside voices. The many misunderstandings and false information about the Church are somewhat our own fault for not clearly explaining who we are and what we believe.

“The Public Affairs Committee, on which I serve, has learned that there is a great need for clear, simple statements that present those who are curious with the basics about the Church as it is today ... You may want to prepare your own list of talking points that will assist you in explaining what we believe to your friends and acquaintances of other faiths. It may be helpful for you, as it is for me, to have on one page a few facts about the Church as it is today to give to them along with a copy of the Articles of Faith.”

Question #3 for class: How would someone know to ask you about the Church in the first place? What percentage of the people who know you know that you're a member of the Church? How did they discover that?

In the course of discussing question #3, share these two quotes from Elder Ballard's talk on "Creating a Gospel Sharing Home":

"Our homes can be gospel-sharing homes as people we know and love come into our home and experience the gospel firsthand in both word and action. We can share the gospel without holding a formal discussion. Our families can be our lesson, and the spirit that emanates from our homes can be our message ... Gospel-sharing homes are very ordinary. They may not always be spotlessly clean nor the children perfectly behaved. But they are a place in which family members clearly love each other, and the Spirit of the Lord is felt by those who visit ... A gospel-sharing home is not defined by whether or not people join the Church as a result of our contact with them. Our opportunity and responsibility are to care, to share, to testify, to invite, and then to allow individuals to decide for themselves. We are blessed when we have invited them to consider the Restoration, regardless of the outcome. At the very least, we have a rewarding relationship with someone from another faith, and we can continue to enjoy their friendship."

"I simply share my joy. I treat everyone as if they were already a member of the Church. If I'm standing by someone in line and strike up a conversation, I share with them how much I enjoyed my Church meetings on Sunday. When coworkers ask, 'What did you do this weekend?' I do not skip from Saturday night to Monday morning. I share with them that I went to church, what was said, and my experiences with the Saints. I talk about how I live, think, and feel."

Also mention Clay Christensen talking about intentionally mentioning his mission, his daughter's mission, BYU, etc in conversation to prompt questions about the Church.

Question #4 for class: Is there anything that stands in your way about telling others you're a member of the Church or about what we believe?

In the course of discussing question #4, share this quote from Elder Ballard's talk on "The Essential Role of Member Missionary Work":

"Remember, brothers and sisters, we're not marketing a product. We're not selling anything. We're not trying to impress anyone with our numbers or our growth. We are members of the restored Church of Jesus Christ, empowered and sent forth by the Lord Himself to find, nourish, and bring safely into His Church those who are seeking to know the truth ... Some members say, 'I'm afraid to share the gospel because I might offend someone.' Experience has shown that people are not offended when the sharing is motivated by the spirit of love and concern. How could anyone be offended when we say something like this: 'I love the way my church helps me' and then add whatever the Spirit directs. It's when we appear only to be fulfilling an assignment and we fail to express real interest and love that we offend others. Don't ever forget, brothers and sisters, that you and I have in our possession the very points of doctrine that will bring people to the Lord. The restored gospel of Jesus Christ has within it the power to bring deep and abiding happiness to the human soul – something that will be valued and cherished for the rest of time and for all eternity. We are not just trying to get people to join our Church; we are sharing with them the fullness of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. But as powerful as our message is, it cannot be imposed or forced upon people. It can only be shared – heart to heart, soul to soul, spirit to spirit – by being good neighbors and by caring and showing love. We need to be

watchful for one another and reach out to one another. And as we do so, we will radiate the gospel in our own lives, and it will radiate to the people the blessings the gospel has to offer.”

Give people homework assignment with sample questions to respond to with simple, easy to understand answers.

Share this quote from Elder Ballard’s talk on “The Essential Role of Member Missionary Work”:

“Over time, the Lord will put into your path those who are seeking the truth. He is the Good Shepherd. He knows His sheep, and they will know His voice, spoken through you, and they will follow Him (see John 10).”

Bear testimony that people will embrace the Gospel when they’re supposed to in their lives (or the life hereafter). Our responsibility is to “stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places” (Mosiah 18:9)