

Speaking in Church with Purpose & Peace

Amen

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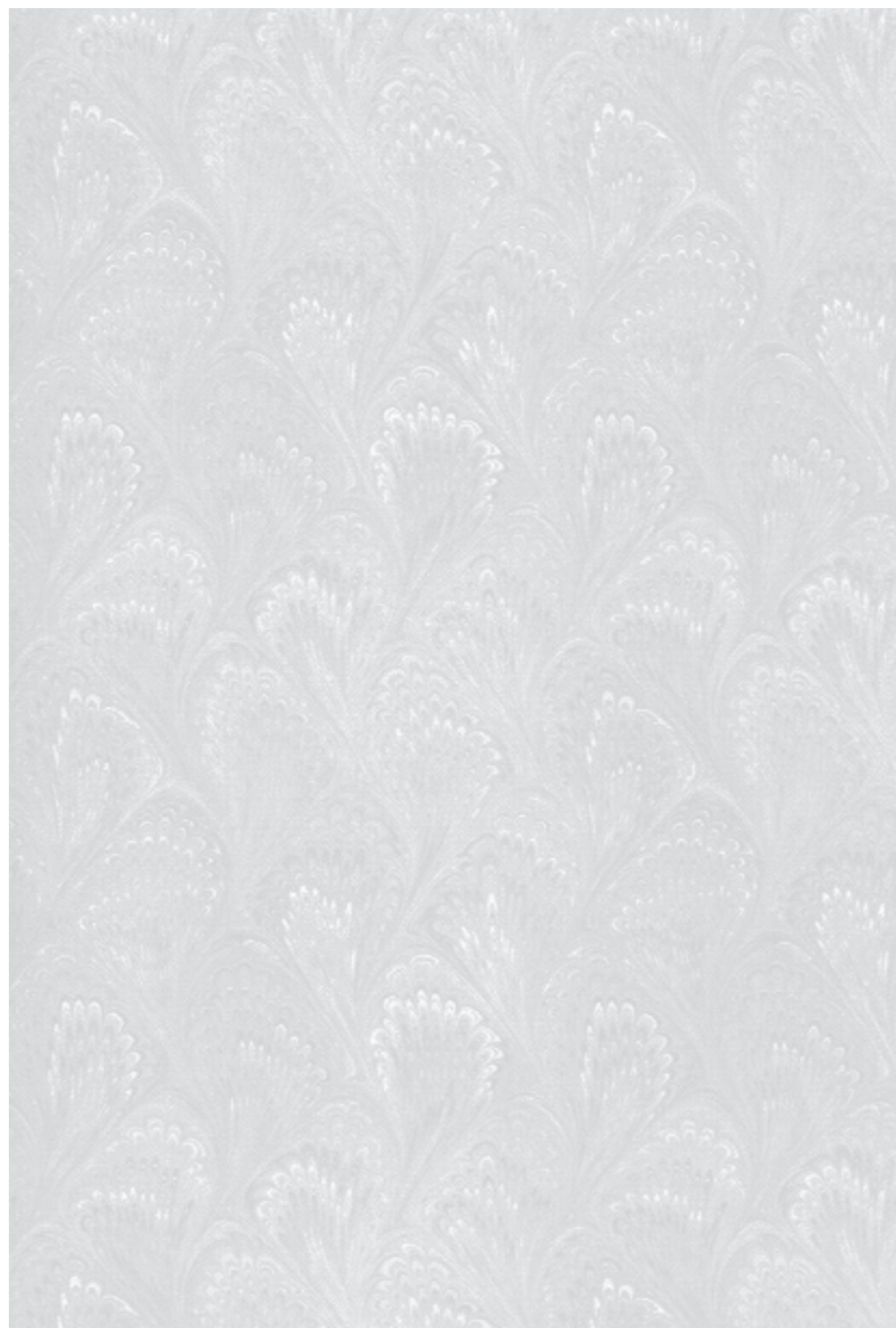
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Realize

YOUR ROLE IN GOD'S KINGDOM



Behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

LUKE 17:21

A RESOUNDING AMEN



*We believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us . . .
we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.*

MOSIAH 5:2

IT TAKES PLACE ALMOST EVERY SUNDAY. A fellow member of the Church stands and delivers a sermon. You're inspired and you're motivated. As a result, you're ready to face the world for another week.

As simple as that occurrence may be, when placed in the context of most of Christendom, it's amazing.

Speaking in Church—standing and bearing solitary witness before others without academic training, certificates and degrees in religion—is one of the most extraordinary aspects of the kingdom of God. Without a paid ministry, it falls upon the membership of the Church to share in the responsibility of giving words of inspiration and motivation each Sabbath. In taking your turn at the pulpit, you help build the kingdom by delivering gospel instruction and strengthening members spiritually

What's it like to give a sermon that changes people's lives forever? As recorded in the early chapters of Mosiah, King Benjamin gave one of the most powerful sermons of all time. The event itself was one of the most astounding peacetime gatherings ever described in ancient America—

remarkable in magnitude, purpose and impact. The massive tower, the ocean of tents, the surging crowds, the anticipation of change—it was an ancient general conference with a single powerful speaker. The transformation of individual souls was phenomenal as they simultaneously experienced a “mighty change” and pledged themselves to obedience and faithfulness.

But if you read the record carefully, you begin to realize that the process was not the work of King Benjamin’s oratory skills alone—it was a joint effort between King Benjamin and the Lord. King Benjamin prepared a magnificent address and delivered it with power. But the Lord prepared King Benjamin.

Both the message and the messenger were inspired of God. Those with prepared hearts were transformed by the message because it was accompanied by a confirmation of the Holy Spirit. At the conclusion of his sermon one can only imagine the resounding “Amen” that echoed through the valley of Zarahemla.

Although he lived another three years, as far as we know, this was the final public address of King Benjamin. What made it possible for King Benjamin to create and deliver such a powerful sermon? This brief list of King Benjamin’s attributes gives a glimpse into what made him a great person, great leader and great speaker. These are attributes you can develop that will help you improve your effectiveness as a speaker.

- ◆ He read the scriptures, both ancient records on the brass plates (MOSIAH 1:3–5) and modern records on the small plates of Nephi (MOSIAH 1:6)
- ◆ He prepared his message in advance, including a written copy (MOSIAH 1:10, 2:8, 9)
- ◆ He commended the obedience and faithfulness of others (MOSIAH 1:11)
- ◆ He showed gratitude to God for all his blessings (MOSIAH 2:4, 19–22)
- ◆ He was a man of Christlike love, referring to the Lamanites as his brethren (MOSIAH 2:5) and his own people as friends, brethren and kindred (MOSIAH 4:4)
- ◆ He was humble (MOSIAH 2:11, 12, 16–17)
- ◆ He served others as evidence of his love for the Lord (MOSIAH 2:17–18)
- ◆ He loved God (MOSIAH 2:28)

- ◆ He spoke in spite of physical limitations (MOSIAH 2:30)
- ◆ He preached the gospel (MOSIAH 2:31–41; 3:9–13, 25–27) and testified of the coming of Christ (MOSIAH 3:2–20)
- ◆ He knew what the Lord wanted him to say and he obeyed (MOSIAH 3:23)

The sermon of King Benjamin lived on long after he delivered it. Ammon taught the words of King Benjamin to the people of Limhi (MOSIAH 8:3). Almost 100 years later, inspired words from that sermon (MOSIAH 3:17) were quoted by Helaman in counsel to his sons Nephi and Lehi (HELAMAN 5:9). Over two thousand years later, we still quote him today.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD SERMON?



*By this I know that thou art a man of God,
and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.*

1 KINGS 17:24

THE PHONE RANG EARLY ONE SUNDAY MORNING. It was my 18-year-old son who was working a summer job in California. He whispered in a low, almost hushed voice, that he needed to know something. “Mom, how do you make French toast?” I chuckled at the almost secretive manner in which this was being discussed. I guess he didn’t want his room-mates to know that he didn’t know how to make French toast.

Once the recipe was revealed, I described how to determine when the French toast was fully cooked and ready to eat. Though you might come up with different adjectives, I would say that good French toast is crispy, cooked-through, warm, chewy, aromatic, tender, fluffy and buttery. Maybe the descriptors don’t seem to make perfect sense—but when they all come together on the griddle it’s a perfect breakfast. And that’s exactly what my son was hoping for.

Describing a great talk in sacrament meeting is just as elusive, if not more so. You know when you hear one, but you may not be able to put it

into words. Think of a sermon that left a lasting impression or made you feel you had feasted at a spiritual banquet. What made it memorable?

The following adjectives are an attempt at describing what kind of talk ward members are hungry for when they come to Church. Use them to motivate you to a higher standard when you are called to speak.

Inspiring. The carefully chosen scriptures and illustrations you use reach into the heart and touch your audience deeply.

Organized. Your introduction lays out where the sermon is going and then you proceed to that destination without delay. Your points flow in a sensible order that is easy to follow.

Refreshing. Your sermon contains new and delightful ideas, avoiding the predictable, overused or cliché.

Magnetic. You use stories, examples and ideas that draw the audience into your sermon and help them sense the importance and urgency of your message. The love you have for your listeners adds special appeal.

Focused. You have a clear mission, which is fulfilled by the thoughts you share. You make certain that your message brings your listeners to a deeper relationship with Christ.

Profound. The ideas you share get below skimming the surface of the gospel and hit at the most important truths of eternity.

Energetic. Your delivery shows you are alive and that you believe what you are saying. Your testimony is delivered with enthusiasm and rings with sincerity.

When you deliver your talk, ward members will feel they have been truly nourished. “Feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 NEPHI 32:3).

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE



For who will hearken unto you in this matter?

1 SAMUEL 30:24

WHY DOES IT SEEM that an invitation to speak often comes right after a splendid sacrament meeting? A meeting filled to the brim with motivating messages.

You may be inclined to compare yourself to the speakers you just heard and think, “What light could I shed on the subject I’ve been assigned? Do I really have anything to say?” Truthfully, you are of greater value than you realize.

On my first backpacking trip at age 13, the most memorable lesson I learned is just how dark night can be. As the sun disappeared behind the hills, darkness melted over the unfamiliar surroundings like hot fudge. Dead flashlight batteries only multiplied my awareness. With absolutely no source of light, the darkness was impenetrable. Every little crackling sound became a ferocious bear or ravenous mountain lion in my mind. Then, at about two AM, the moon rose: a glorious, reflective, light-giving orb. As she peaked over the mountain ridge, I drank in her amazing luminescence. As I glanced

down, I was surprised to find I cast a shadow. The light gave me hope until morning. Did the moon know what a gift she was giving me?

When preparing to speak in sacrament meeting, you may be tempted to minimize the significance of your efforts or wonder if anyone will take you seriously. When you underestimate your potential influence, it makes the thought of speaking in sacrament meeting a little less uncomfortable because you've convinced yourself that it doesn't really matter that much. Nothing could be further from the truth.

What you do really matters. It matters to the ward. It matters to the Lord. And it matters to you. It matters because what you're doing is spreading holy light. In a world filled with darkness, your light matters immensely. Take counsel from the Savior: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (MATTHEW 5:16).

All you have to do is recall some of the talks, firesides and lessons that have helped shape your testimony to realize that essential truths, shared in simplicity, can illuminate the heart forever.

RESPOND WITH GLADNESS



He that receiveth my servants receiveth me.

DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS 84:36

IT SEEMS HARMLESS ENOUGH. A member of the bishopric stops you in the hall at Church and strikes up a casual conversation—kids, callings, schedules. Before long the topic migrates to family vacations and the fact that, yes, you will be in town next week. Speak in sacrament meeting? But . . .

At that exact moment what would you normally be feeling? A bit anxious? Join the throng. Tempted to offer a spontaneous excuse for your sudden unavailability? You're not alone. But what if you knew the invitation to speak in sacrament meeting were from the Savior? Ultimately, it is. "Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" (D&C 1:38).

Once you can honestly accept the idea that the invitation to speak is from the Savior, your attitude toward the opportunity changes. The Savior knows both your strengths and your weaknesses and has invited you, in your imperfect and flawed condition, to address members of His flock. He has faith in you. And He expects you to have faith in Him.

Questioning one's ability and adequacy to speak is nothing new. The first record in the scriptures of someone with these same doubts is Enoch. "He bowed himself to the earth, before the Lord, and spake before the Lord, saying: Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant?" The Lord responded with assurance, "Go forth and do as I have commanded thee. . . . Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance" (MOSES 6:31–32).

Another example of self-doubt is Moses. He explained to the Lord that the children of Israel wouldn't listen to him. "They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice. . . . Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (EXODUS 4:1, 10). The Lord rebuked Moses saying, "Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or the deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say" (EXODUS 4:11).

In a Church staffed with a lay ministry, it's sometimes easy to forget that leaders serve with little formal training. Most of us inch along in our callings with on-the-job training, learning as much from our missteps and stumbles as from our giant strides forward. Asking someone to speak in sacrament meeting is no easy task. The risks are significant for the asker—rejection, miscommunication, offending or misunderstanding. Be sensitive to the difficulty of your priesthood leader's task also.

You may be asked in person or in writing or you may even get the invitation on your answering machine. Regardless of the method of conveyance, the invitation must still be seen as coming from the Lord. Once that hurdle is overcome, it's time, like Saul of Tarsus, who, when he finally recognized the voice of the Savior, said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (ACTS 9:6)