

Know How to Ask and Respond to Questions

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Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said:

“How easy it is for a teacher to respond quickly to simple questions, to close a conversation that might have ignited a sparkling and lively class discussion. . . . Few things are so agonizing for a new teacher as to want to start a discussion and then have everyone remain silent. The use of discussion, simple question and answer, is one of the basic, useful, and important teaching processes. It often does not go well simply because the teacher does not know how to ask questions or how to respond (or how not to respond) to those that are asked by the class” (*Teach Ye Diligently* [1975], 55–56).

Questions Should Invite Inspiration

Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said:

“To ask and to answer questions is at the heart of all learning and all teaching. The Master asked, answered, and sometimes chose not to answer questions in his ministry. . . .

“ . . . Some questions invite inspiration. Great teachers ask those. That may take just a small change of words, an inflection in the voice. Here is a question that might not invite inspiration: ‘How is a true prophet recognized?’ That question invites an answer which is a list, drawn from memory of the scriptures and the words of living prophets. . . .

“But we could also ask the question this way, with just a small difference: ‘When have you felt that you were in the presence of a prophet?’ That will invite individuals to search their memories for feelings. After asking, we might wisely wait for a moment before calling on someone to respond. Even those who do not speak will be thinking of spiritual experiences. That will invite the Holy Ghost” (*The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest* [address to religious educators, 6 Feb. 1998], 5–6).

Avoid Debate or Adversarial Discussion

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said:

“The Lord’s prescribed methods of acquiring sacred knowledge are very different from the methods used by those who acquire learning exclusively by study. For example, a frequent technique of scholarship is debate or adversarial discussion, a method with which I have had considerable personal experience. But the Lord has instructed us in ancient and modern scriptures that we should not contend over the points of his doctrine (see 3 Nephi 11:28–30; D&C 10:63). Those who teach the gospel are instructed not to preach with ‘wrath’ or ‘strife’ (D&C 60:14; see also 2 Timothy 2:23–25), but in ‘mildness and in meekness’ (D&C 38:41), ‘reviling not against revilers’ (D&C 19:30). Similarly, techniques devised for adversary debate or to search out differences and work out compromises are not effective in acquiring gospel knowledge” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 37; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 29).