

**D. Todd Christofferson**, excerpts from *“Lifelong Disciples of Jesus Christ”* at a Religious Educators Conference Devotional, June 12, 2025

**1. What is “lifelong discipleship?”**

2. Lifelong discipleship is an essential aspect of the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine of Christ expresses how we come unto Christ and receive the gift of His atoning grace. We exercise our agency to have faith in Him, repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost. But for Christ’s Atonement to have its full, transformative effect in us requires that we continue in this covenant path—the path of discipleship—to the end of our mortal lives. In Nephi’s words: “And I heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved.”
3. In the CES resource “Strengthening Religious Education,” we’re taught:
4. “The purpose of religious education is to teach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ from the scriptures and modern prophets in a way that helps our students:
5. Develop faith in and a testimony of Heavenly Father and His ‘great plan,’ ...
6. Become lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ, who make and keep covenants, ... [and]
7. Strengthen their ability to find answers, resolve doubts, respond with faith, and give reason for the hope within them in whatever challenges they may face.”<sup>1</sup>
8. Lifelong discipleship is an essential aspect of the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine of Christ expresses how we come unto Christ and receive the gift of His atoning grace. We exercise our agency to have faith in Him, repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost. But for Christ’s Atonement to have its full, transformative effect in us requires that we continue in this covenant path—the path of discipleship—to the end of our mortal lives. In Nephi’s words: *“And I heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved.”*<sup>2</sup>
9. President Nelson has taught: “True disciples of Jesus Christ are willing to stand out, speak up, and be different from the people of the world. They are undaunted, devoted, and courageous.” How is this kind of discipleship achieved? What does that mean for us as religious educators? And how can we more effectively teach in a way that our youth and young adults become lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ?

## **10. Agency's Role in Discipleship**

11. So first, agency's role in discipleship. One of the most important gifts God gave His children was moral agency. This power and privilege—and responsibility—to act for ourselves is essential to realizing our full potential as children of God. It is central to our progression on the covenant path. God's plan, as you know, was not to do everything for us but to provide a structure that allowed us to make our own choices to grow individually. Agency was key to our progression as spirits in the past, and it is key for what we can become under God's plan of happiness, now and in eternity.
12. The adversary knows this and seeks to compromise our agency.
13. The War in Heaven can be seen, in large part, as a battle to preserve the agency of man. And that battle continues in this mortal sphere. Satan attacks agency on at least two fronts. On the one hand, he inspires [ideas and practices] that diminish personal responsibility or that employ [being forced or manipulated].
14. The other focus of the adversary's assault against agency has particular significance for us as teachers. As identified in the scripture just cited, Satan, "the father of all lies," acts "to deceive and to blind men." Agency becomes meaningless if we don't know what's true and what's not, and therefore cannot make informed, intelligent choices. The antidote to deception is truth....
15. God sent His Son as "the way, the truth, and the life." He gives us prophets to teach and guide us to truth. He's given the gift of the Holy Ghost to confirm that truth, and the teacher is to help students hear and choose to embrace truth.
16. But agency in the context of religious education requires a further step beyond imparting gospel truths. It is essential that we teach in a way that invites students to exercise their agency in the learning process. We want to help them become active participants in the process and take responsibility for their own learning. Activating students' agency to take personal ownership in learning has implications for the development of lasting belief, lasting testimony. It is in so doing that they can become active and lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.
17. Taking ownership for choices deepens personal conviction. When we don't act for ourselves, we can unwittingly find that our faith lacks the depth required to overcome life's questions and challenges and to be lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ. In the Lord's own words:

18. “For they that are wise and have received the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day.”

#### 19. Teaching in the Savior's Way

20. Now, this foundational role agency plays in our own personal development has implications for the way we teach as religious educators....And we ask you, our religious educators, to teach in ways that invite personal engagement and ownership of learning. In each of these settings, real growth happens most effectively when young people are given opportunities to act and not just be acted upon.

21. To create these types of learning experiences for His disciples, the Savior found ways to help them take responsibility for their learning. Consider [these] ways the Savior engaged His disciples: (1) asking inspired questions, and (2) extending personal invitations. In all the Savior's invitations, He gives His disciples opportunities to act, to think, and to take ownership of their learning and their growth.

### 22. Implications for Religious Education

23. Earlier this year, Elder Clark Gilbert extended an invitation to our seminary and institute teachers to find ways deliberately to provide students opportunities to act and take responsibility for their learning....this is a reminder that effective teachers invite students to take responsibility in their own learning.

24. In (the church manual) “*Teaching in the Savior's Way*”, we're reminded that inviting diligent learning requires us to help students become agents in their own learning process. There are several ways this can happen, but let me emphasize at least three from that teaching resource.

1. First, we can create learning experiences where we “invite learners to prepare to learn.” This can happen through pre-reading assignments, study questions, and personal invitations.
2. Second, we should “encourage learners to share the truths they are learning.” There are so many ways to do this, and each of you will find personalized approaches that work for you and your students.
3. And third, we should “*invite learners to live what they are learning*” (italics added). We should always look for ways to invite students to apply what they are learning in their

own lives. This can come through personal invitations, reflective exercises, and a host of other efforts to help students change and become something more in Christ.

## **25. Helping Students Take Charge of Their Testimonies**

26. Finally, on helping students take charge of their testimonies. Inviting diligent learning is foundational to developing lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ because it helps learners take responsibility for their learning, as we've been saying. One of the ways President Nelson has encouraged this ownership of our personal growth is in his invitation to the young adults to take charge of their testimonies. In his worldwide devotional to young adults in 2022, President Nelson stated:
27. "I plead with you to take charge of your testimony. Work for it. Own it. Care for it. Nurture it so that it will grow. Feed it truth. Don't pollute it with the false philosophies of unbelieving men and women and then wonder why your testimony is waning. Engage in daily, earnest, humble prayer. Nourish yourself in the words of ancient and modern prophets. Ask the Lord to teach you how to hear Him better. Spend more time in the temple and in family history work. As you make your testimony your highest priority, watch for miracles to happen in your life."
28. When he spoke to the young adults, President Nelson asked a series of questions: "Do you want to feel peace about concerns that presently plague you? Do you want to know Jesus Christ better? Do you want to learn how His divine power can heal your wounds and weaknesses? Do you want to experience the sweet, soothing power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ working in your life? Seeking to answer these questions will require effort—much effort." He validates the students' concerns by saying: "If you have questions—and I hope you do—seek answers with the fervent desire to believe. Learn all you can about the gospel and be sure to turn to truth-filled sources for guidance."
29. When we help students exercise their personal agency, their conversion will deepen in ways that lead to lifelong discipleship. Last October, President Nelson stated, "Now is the time for us to make our discipleship our highest priority." And he added, "It is neither too early nor too late for you to become a devout disciple of Jesus Christ." Let us act diligently now before it is too late. Now is the time, as he said.