



In a world that is desperate for good news, it is critical that we, as faith sons and daughters of the Universal Father and students of The Urantia Book, learn how to adorn our message of hope to ailing humanity with truth, beauty, and goodness. To achieve this, we need to find answers to the following pivotal questions: firstly, what should be the nature of the message that we want to convey to our fellows, and secondly, how should we go about doing it? These are the questions I wish to address in this article.

It is natural in our enthusiasm for The Urantia Book, the 5th epochal revelation, to assume that we should be encouraging individuals to read this book, replete as it is with a panoramic description of the ascending career, an unparalleled account of the life of our Master, Michael of Nebadon, and answers to almost every question that we have ever asked about God. However, would this be wise? Is it possible that rather than enlightening people, we might inadvertently frighten them away? Indeed, two crucial supplementary questions we need to ask with respect to preaching and teaching are: what does our Master, Michael of Nebadon want us to do and how can we learn from his example when he incarnated on our planet as Jesus of Nazareth?

But before answering those questions, I want to quote from what is referred to as “the Publication Mandate” regarding the *timing* of the appearance of The Urantia Book. This brief document which is understood to have come from the same source as the book itself, makes it clear that “the book is being given to those who are ready for it long before the day of its world-wide mission”. It is my belief that we are not in that “day” yet. Hence, interest in the book tends to be sporadic rather than widespread. Most people are not “ready for it.”

This doesn’t mean that we won’t experience some success in attracting interest if we focus on promoting the book and its voluminous teachings. Jesus’ apostles and disciples experienced success even though they preached a message that was different to the one he explicitly instructed them to deliver. But the outcome could have been dramatically different had they obediently preached the original gospel message that he had taught them [Paper 149:2.1, page 1670.2].

The UB states unequivocally that we are still within the purview or dispensation of the 4th epochal revelation. It seems that the world needs to be spiritized before it can experience spiritual renaissance; only then will the UB enjoy much wider acceptance. “Modern culture must become spiritually baptized with a new revelation of Jesus’ life and illuminated with a new understanding of his gospel of eternal salvation” [Paper 195:10.1, page 2084.1]. For this reason, our primary focus (not necessarily our only focus) needs to be on promoting the 4th rather than the 5th epochal revelation.

Now let me address the first of the two crucial questions in paragraph two: what does our Master, Michael of Nebadon want us to do?

What does Jesus want us to do?

To answer this question, I will cite three UB passages that I believe state plainly what the Master's will is regarding the work of preaching and teaching. The first is in the context of Jesus instructing his apostles and disciples on how to deliver the kingdom gospel message.

The Master sought to impress upon all teachers of the gospel of the kingdom that their only business was to reveal God to the individual man as his Father - to lead this individual man to become son-conscious; then to present this same man to God as his faith son. [Paper 141:7.4, page 1593.5]

Some may reason that this work was only given to his twelve apostles and was not intended for his other disciples or for followers in our present time. The next passage however, dispels this notion.

“Go, then, into all the world proclaiming this gospel of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men to all nations and races and ever be wise in your choice of methods for presenting the good news to the different races and tribes of mankind.” [Paper 191:4.4, page 2042.1]

These words are spoken by the resurrected Jesus to Abner and Lazarus and some one hundred and fifty of their associates, including more than fifty of the evangelistic corps of the seventy. It plainly confirms the commission he gave to them while still in the flesh. It is apparent that this command is not just given to those who witnessed his morontia resurrection there in the first century but is applicable to all his disciples in the centuries that followed.

Some may still argue that this commission only applied to his first century followers and has no relevance to us living in this 21st century. In response, I quote the third passage which comes from the second last paper of the book and is clearly directed at readers of the UB.

*Religion does need new leaders, spiritual men and women who will dare to depend solely on Jesus and his incomparable teachings. If Christianity persists in neglecting its spiritual mission while it continues to busy itself with social and material problems, the spiritual renaissance must await the coming of these new teachers of Jesus' religion **who will be exclusively devoted to the spiritual regeneration of men.*** [Paper 195:9.4, page 2082.9]

It is apparent from this passage that the coming of the future spiritual renaissance for our planet will depend on the appearance of “new teachers of Jesus’ religion” rather than promoters of the UB.

I hope this will become clearer as I now answer the second of the crucial questions for our time.

How can Jesus’ example help us to adorn our message with truth, beauty, and goodness?

To answer this question, I will look at nine principles of preaching and teaching that Jesus employed when ministering to others.

1. GET TO KNOW PEOPLE - GROW TO LOVE THEM - BE FRIENDLY!



Nothing stands out more in Jesus’ ministry than his **love for people**, wherever he went. This was surely the secret of his success in reaching the hearts of his fellows.

Jesus truly loved people — just common folks [Paper 127:3.7, page 1399.6].

Jesus could help men so much because he loved them so sincerely. He truly loved each man, each woman, and each child. He could be such a true friend because of his remarkable insight — he knew so fully what was in the heart and in the mind of man. He was an interested and keen observer. He was an expert in the comprehension of human need, clever in detecting human longings. [Paper 171:7.4, page 1874.7]

Perhaps this was most remarkably demonstrated during the time he spent in Rome with Ganid and Gonod.

*....during the sojourn in Rome, Jesus personally came into **affectionate and uplifting contact** with upward of five hundred mortals of the realm. [Paper 132:4.3, page 1461.1]*

*Jesus learned much about men while in Rome, but the most valuable of all the manifold experiences of his six months' sojourn in that city was his contact with, and influence upon, the religious leaders of the empire's capital. Before the end of the first week in Rome Jesus had sought out, and had made the acquaintance of, the worth-while leaders of the Cynics, the Stoics, and the mystery cults, in particular the Mithraic group.... He selected five of the leading Stoics, eleven of the Cynics, and sixteen of the mystery-cult leaders and spent much of his spare time for almost six months in **intimate association** with these religious teachers. [Paper 132:0.4, page 1455.4]*

Jesus was sowing seeds – he was doing ‘a piece of work’, a work in progress – he knew the seed would not mature until after his bestowal.

The significance of this remarkable doing can the better be understood when we record the fact that, out of this group of thirty-two Jesus-taught religious leaders in Rome, only two were unfruitful; the thirty became pivotal individuals in the establishment of Christianity in Rome.... [Paper 132, page 1455 – 1461]

How much more effective and persuasive our words would be if we took the time and made the effort to really get to know people by showing them sincere friendliness.

2. ASK QUESTIONS AND LISTEN WITH GENUINE INTEREST



One of the best ways to get to know people is to ask open questions and listen patiently for the answers. For this to be effective, one should be sincere, genuine, and caring, without being intrusive.

Jesus' usual technique of social contact was to draw people out and into talking with him by asking them questions. The interview would usually begin by his asking them questions and end by their asking him questions. He was equally adept in teaching by either asking or answering questions. As a rule, to those he

taught the most, he said the least. Those who derived most benefit from his personal ministry were overburdened, anxious, and dejected mortals who gained much relief because of the opportunity to unburden their souls to a sympathetic and understanding listener, and he was all that and more. [Paper 132:4.2, page 1460.6]

This is a fundamentally important technique! People don't ask questions these days. Why? Because they are preoccupied with their own perspectives on life. If they asked questions they would risk hearing answers that may challenge their personal worldview!! Deep listening is a rare and ancient art which needs to be revived! This skill is a prerequisite for techniques 6, 7, and 8

Our objective should be to gain a true understanding of the other person's point of view and life experience. Seek accurate understanding. BE PATIENT!!!

"Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable." – David Augsburg (American Anabaptist author)

3. TEACH WITH RESPECT AND NOT WITH FORCE



In proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, we're not trying to win a debate or an argument! We don't want to engage in mental fisticuffs or sophistry!!

We don't want to destroy what little faith they might have nor do we want to crush their self respect.

While Jesus later directed that the apostles should go forth, as John had, preaching the gospel and instructing believers, he laid emphasis on the

proclamation of the "good tidings of the kingdom of heaven." He unfailingly impressed upon his associates that they must "show forth love, compassion, and sympathy." He early taught his followers that the kingdom of heaven was a spiritual experience having to do with the enthronement of God in the hearts of men. [Paper 137:7.13, page 1535.5]

Jesus taught: Always respect the personality of man. Never should a righteous cause be promoted by force; spiritual victories can be won only by spiritual power. This injunction against the employment of material influences refers to psychic force as well as to physical force. Overpowering arguments and mental superiority are not to be employed to coerce men and women into the kingdom. Man's mind is not to be crushed by the mere weight of logic or overawed by shrewd eloquence. While emotion as a factor in human decisions cannot be wholly eliminated, it should not be directly appealed to in the teachings of those who would advance the cause of the kingdom. Make your appeals directly to the divine spirit that dwells within the minds of men. Do not appeal to fear, pity, or mere sentiment. In appealing to men, be fair; exercise self-control and exhibit due restraint; show proper respect for the personalities of your pupils. Remember that I have said: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, and if any man will open, I will come in."

In bringing men into the kingdom, do not lessen or destroy their self-respect. While overmuch self-respect may destroy proper humility and end in pride, conceit, and arrogance, the loss of self-respect often ends in paralysis of the will. It is the purpose of this gospel to restore self-respect to those who have lost it and to restrain it in those who have it. Make not the mistake of only condemning the wrongs in the lives of your pupils; remember also to accord generous recognition for the most praiseworthy things in their lives. Forget not that I will stop at nothing to restore self-respect to those who have lost it, and who really desire to regain it. [Paper 159:3.2,3, page 1765.4,5]

4. RECEPTIVITY – DON'T OVERTEACH!



We cannot teach advanced spiritual truths to people who have not been spiritually reborn. This is the purpose of the 4th epochal revelation – to prepare the world spiritually to accept the 5th ER.

Jesus taught these men [the apostles] all they could assimilate. He did not make the mistake of overteaching them. He did not precipitate

confusion by the presentation of truth too far beyond their capacity to comprehend. [Paper 137:7.14, page 1535.6]

That night Jesus discoursed to the apostles on the new life in the kingdom. He said in part: “When you enter the kingdom, you are reborn. You cannot teach the deep things of the spirit to those who have been born only of the flesh; first see that men are born of the spirit before you seek to instruct them in the advanced ways of the spirit. Do not undertake to show men the beauties of the temple until you have first taken them into the temple. Introduce men to God and as the sons of God before you discourse on the doctrines of the fatherhood of God and the sonship of men. Do not strive with men — always be patient. It is not your kingdom; you are only ambassadors. Simply go forth proclaiming: This is the kingdom of heaven — God is your Father and you are his sons, and this good news, if you wholeheartedly believe it, is your eternal salvation.” [Paper 141:6.4, page 1592.6]

Are we developing skill in being able to “introduce people to God, as the sons [and daughters] of God”?

Wouldn't sharing the UB with people who have not been “born of the spirit” be an example of overteaching? This book contains many advanced truths! Would we teach astrophysics to a kindergarten class?

5. BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR HUMAN NEEDS



We need to listen! Everyone is suffering in some way or another, but many hide their suffering or are reluctant to let others know about it. Look for opportunities to be of service to others.

“...he (Jesus) knew so fully what was in the heart and in the mind of man. He was an interested and keen observer. He was an expert in the comprehension of human need, clever in detecting human longings.” [Paper 171:7.4, page 1874.7]

While they were up in the mountains, Jesus had a long talk with a young man who was fearful and downcast. Failing to derive comfort and courage from association with his fellows, this youth had sought the solitude of the hills; he had grown up with a feeling of helplessness and inferiority. These natural tendencies had been augmented by numerous difficult circumstances which the lad had encountered as he grew up, notably, the loss of his father when he was twelve years of age. As they met, Jesus said: “Greetings, my friend! why so downcast on such a beautiful day? If something has happened to distress you, perhaps I can in some manner assist you. At any rate it affords me real pleasure to proffer my services.”

The young man was disinclined to talk, and so Jesus made a second approach to his soul, saying: “I understand you come up in these hills to get away from folks; so, of course, you do not want to talk with me, but I would like to know whether you are familiar with these hills; do you know the direction of the trails? and, perchance, could you inform me as to the best route to Phenix?” [Paper 130:6.1,2, page 1437.1,2]

Encountering this young man who seemed so downcast, Jesus saw an opportunity to talk about “the joys of loving activities in the brotherhood of men and in the service of the God of heaven.” However, before

doing so, he made sure that the young man would be receptive to this message. At first he wasn't but Jesus made an appeal to "his soul" by employing the skillful technique of asking him for help, specifically in finding the best route to Phenix. This was successful in arousing the youth's attention and interest. The rest of the discourse is a great example of love meeting need. Jesus never seemed to be in a hurry! He was a keen observer and sympathetic to the suffering of his fellows. Other examples: Nalda, the Samaritan woman at the well [Paper 143:5.2, page 1612.5]; the falsely accused poor man and the magistrate [Paper 132:4.8, page 1462.1]; the woman caught in adultery [Paper 162:3.2, page 1793.1].

6. EMPHASIZE TRUTHS HELD IN COMMON



This requires listening deeply, carefully, and mindfully. If possible, we need to develop a good understanding of the person and their belief system.

“There is not a Urantia religion that could not profitably study and assimilate the best of the truths contained in every other faith, for all contain truth.” [Paper 92:7.3, page 1012.4]

“While your religion is a matter of personal experience, it is most important that you should be exposed to the knowledge of a vast number of other religious experiences (the diverse interpretations of other and diverse mortals) to the end that you may prevent your religious life from becoming egocentric — circumscribed, selfish,

and unsocial.” [Paper 103:1.3, 1130.2]

How well do we know the teachings of the major faith groups? Jesus was an enthusiastic practitioner of interfaith dialogue and outreach. [Paper 132:0.4, page 1455.4; Paper 134:3.1-7, pages 1485.3 – 1486.2]

In Rome, he made judicious use of the sources familiar to his audience:

In each case he would select the truth in what they taught and then proceed so to embellish and illuminate this truth in their minds that in a very short time this enhancement of the truth effectively crowded out the associated error. [Paper 132:0.4, page 1455.4]

A good case in point was his association with Nabon, the Mithraic cult leader. Jesus was able to speak about concepts and ideas that Nabon was familiar with, so much so, that “Nabon had thought to make a convert of Jesus and had even suggested that he return to Palestine as a Mithraic teacher. He little realized that Jesus was preparing him to become one of the early converts to the gospel of the kingdom.” [Paper 132:3.1, page 1459.1]

Observe how Jesus made discriminating use of the scriptures in teaching and training (130.1.2; 130.8.2).

Jesus was an artist at selecting and sequencing readings when he taught in the synagogue (127.3.8).



7. BUILD ON THE TRUTH THAT THE OTHER PERSON ALREADY HAS

Like the previous principle, this requires that we become well acquainted with our fellows and their belief systems before we attempt to convey the gospel message. The process of building on the other person's beliefs usually takes several encounters;

by being a deep, mindful, and patient listener, we show them respect, remove religious and historical obstacles, and are more likely to receive respect and a listening ear back from them.

And this was his method of instruction: Never once did he attack their errors or even mention the flaws in their teachings. In each case he would select the truth in what they taught and then proceed so to embellish and illuminate this truth in their minds that in a very short time this enhancement of the truth effectively crowded out the associated error; and thus were these Jesus-taught men and women prepared for the subsequent recognition of additional and similar truths in the teachings of the early Christian missionaries. It was this early acceptance of the teachings of the gospel preachers which gave that powerful impetus to the rapid spread of Christianity in Rome and from there throughout the empire. [Paper 132:0.4, page 1455.4]

8. ADD WHAT IS POSITIVE RATHER THAN SUBTRACT WHAT IS NEGATIVE



When we focus on and attack what is negative in a person's belief system, more often than not we experience push back and conflict. This was the lesson that Jesus was trying to impress upon Simon Peter, who was frustrated at not being able to turn Teherma away from his pagan beliefs. Simon regarded Teherma as a "fire worshiper". An exasperated Simon questioned Jesus:

"Why did he so resist me and so readily lend an ear to you?"

In response, Jesus said:

"Simon, Simon, how many times have I instructed you to refrain from all efforts to take something out of the hearts of those who seek salvation? How often have I told you to labor only to put something into these hungry souls? Lead men into the kingdom, and the great and living truths of the kingdom will presently drive out all serious error. When you have presented to mortal man the good news that God is his Father, you can the easier persuade him that he is in reality a son of God. And having done that, you have brought the light of salvation to the one who sits in darkness.

Simon, when the Son of Man came first to you, did he come denouncing Moses and the prophets and proclaiming a new and better way of life? No. I came not to take away that which you had from your forefathers but to show you the perfected vision of that which your fathers saw only in part. Go then, Simon, teaching and preaching the kingdom, and when you have a man safely and securely within the kingdom, then is the time, when such a one shall come to you with inquiries, to impart instruction having to do with the progressive advancement of the soul within the divine kingdom." [Paper 141:6.2, page 1592.4]

What a wonderful teaching method... putting something into the person's heart rather than taking something out!

In particular, do not undermine a person's trust in the scripture that motivates their life. When Jesus responded to Gadhah's question about Jonah, *"Jesus perceived that this young man's life had been tremendously influenced by this tradition, and that its contemplation had impressed upon him the folly of trying to run away from duty; Jesus therefore said nothing that would suddenly destroy the foundations of*

Gadiah's present motivation for practical living." He was thus able to use the story of Jonah as a parable expressing spiritual truth (130:1.2).

9. TEACH BY BEING A LIVING WITNESS OF JESUS' RELIGION



Of the nine principles of teaching and proclaiming the gospel message that Jesus gave to his disciples, I consider this final one to be the most important. In a world which has become cynical about religion and it's often hypocritical claims, it is crucial that we demonstrate the truth of our message through the power of our actions, our lives! In other words, our actions should speak louder than our words!!!

I think this is the substance of what Jesus meant when he admonished his disciples regarding their proclamation of the "gospel of love and truth"

before he finally departed from their midst:

"Peace be upon you. That which my Father sent me into the world to establish belongs not to a race, a nation, nor to a special group of teachers or preachers. This gospel of the kingdom belongs to both Jew and gentile, to rich and poor, to free and bond, to male and female, even to the little children. And you are all to proclaim this gospel of love and truth by the lives which you live in the flesh. You shall love one another with a new and startling affection, even as I have loved you. You will serve mankind with a new and amazing devotion, even as I have served you. And when men see you so love them, and when they behold how fervently you serve them, they will perceive that you have become faithfellow of the kingdom of heaven, and they will follow after the Spirit of Truth which they see in your lives, to the finding of eternal salvation."
[Paper 191:6.2, page 2044.3]

And in conclusion, this extraordinary statement from Jesus highlights the primary importance of exemplifying in our lives the living truth of Jesus' gospel:

"Let me emphatically state this eternal truth: If you, by truth co-ordination, learn to exemplify in your lives this beautiful wholeness of righteousness, your fellow men will then seek after you that they may gain what you have so acquired. The measure wherewith truth seekers are drawn to you represents the measure of your truth endowment, your righteousness. The extent to which you have to go with your message to the people is, in a way, the measure of your failure to live the whole or righteous life, the truth-co-ordinated life." [Paper 155:1.5, page 1726.2]

Epilogue

In conclusion, allow me to emphasize the key questions that we need to ask ourselves regarding the content and delivery of our message:

- What should be the primary objective of our preaching and teaching?
- What can we learn from Jesus' ways of getting to know people?
- Why is asking appropriate questions and being a good listener so effective in reaching others?
- What does it mean to over-teach and what are the risks of doing so?
- Why was Jesus so interested in those who were struggling and conscious of their spiritual need?

- Why would employing force and intellectual superiority be counter-productive?
- Why is it important for us to understand other peoples' sources of religious ideas?
- Why is finding common ground so important and how can we achieve this?
- How do we feel when people criticize our beliefs? Why should we avoid doing that to others?
- What is the most powerful way in which we can reach the hearts of our fellows?

I hope that this discussion has been a useful guide in helping us to discover what it is that the Spirit of Truth wants us to do in these momentous times in which we live. Many will disagree with my assertions at the beginning of the article regarding the importance of prioritizing the gospel of Jesus over the dissemination of The Urantia Book. At least I hope that in doing so, I will be successful in generating further inquiry and discussion.