

## The Perfect Lesson

When my stake put out a request for institute service missionaries, I didn't even need a full 30 seconds to decide. I was in! I enthusiastically filled out the online application and soon found myself, a few days later, in a 30-minute interview with the institute director. By the end, I was given the highest of compliments: *You're a fantastic candidate! You will bless so many lives!*

Naturally, I let this go straight to my head. *Of course, I will!* I thought. My assignment came. I would be teaching BYU-Pathway students from Africa. *Perfect! I've studied the scriptures. I know gospel principles. I served a mission. I got this.*

When the first day of institute arrived, I eagerly logged onto Zoom, ready to welcome my students as they joined. I waited. And waited. Ten minutes passed. Then twenty. Crickets. No one showed up. Then frustration crept in, arriving fashionably late but wasting no time making itself comfortable.

I had spent time preparing a lesson no one would see, much less learn from. *How could these students be so irresponsible?* I wondered. *How can they expect to succeed in college or life, if they can't even make it to a Zoom meeting?* After a half hour, a single student popped in with a shaky internet connection, explaining that a terrible rainstorm had knocked out internet access across several African countries, making it nearly impossible for students to join the class. And just like that, my righteous indignation turned into an embarrassing realization. It was not their fault; external challenges beyond their control stood in their way. I had been so quick to judge, assuming irresponsibility where there was actually perseverance. I had mistaken a technical limitation for a lack of commitment.

I had made a big mistake.

I was reminded of Jesus Christ's words: *"Judge not, that ye be not judged."* Not only had I judged, but I had judged unfairly. These students weren't just interested in learning about the gospel, they were living it. Jesus taught that true discipleship isn't about showing up with a flawless lesson plan, it's about seeing people, loving them, and meeting them where they are. He saw beyond appearances and into the hearts of those He served. He showed compassion to all, regardless of their struggles, and invited them to come unto Him. In that moment of realization, David O. McKay's words took on a deeper meaning: *"Wisdom is the right application of knowledge; and true education...is the application of knowledge to the development of a noble and Godlike character."* I had knowledge, but I had failed to apply it with love. This experience changed me. Instead of assuming, I started asking. Instead of judging, I sought to understand. I adjusted my teaching methods, prayed for my students, and found ways to support them beyond just delivering lessons. It turned out to be one of the best lessons I never "planned" to learn. And

the greatest irony was that I almost missed it.