

Alma as an Intentional Father

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In these last days, Satan has made an all-out assault on the family. He seeks to destroy its sanctity; he demeans the important roles of mothers and fathers; he encourages moral uncleanness and violations of the law of chastity; and he discourages parents from placing the bearing and rearing of their children as one of their highest priorities.¹ One of Satan's prime targets in the last days has been fathers: he seeks to make fathers irrelevant by diminishing their role in the family.²

Presently, too many men are absent or, at least, have been marginalized in the lives of their families. These men are disconnected from their children emotionally, socially, physically, and certainly spiritually. Although many would like to believe that fathers are obsolete, research repeatedly documents that fathers matter.³ In his landmark book *Life without Father*, author David Popenoe concluded, "I know of few other bodies of evidence whose weight leans so much in one

direction as does the evidence about family structure: On the whole, two parents—a father and mother—are better for the child than one parent.”⁴ From a gospel perspective, we understand that a loving, caring, involved father is vital to the family and can positively influence his children in every conceivable way. Indeed, the influence of a strong father in the lives of his children is unmeasurable.

Latter-day prophets, seers, and revelators have always impressed upon the Saints the importance of intentional fathers. For example, President Harold B. Lee reminded fathers, “The most important of the Lord’s work that you will ever do will be the work you do within the walls of your own home.”⁵ Elder D. Todd Christofferson recently taught, “We believe in ‘the ideal of the man who puts his family first.’ . . . We believe that far from being superfluous, fathers are unique and irreplaceable. . . . The role of father is of divine origin, beginning with a Father in Heaven and, in this mortal sphere, with Father Adam.”⁶ “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” states, “Fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families.”⁷

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should believe that fathers matter. Unfortunately, good fathers are becoming an endangered species—even in the Church.⁸ Likewise, there is a scarcity of fathering heroes in our modern culture, and many youth are turning elsewhere for role models. However, President Spencer W. Kimball helped the Church of Jesus Christ understand where paternal examples can be found. Besides our own fathers, and perhaps other close relations, President Kimball explained:

We all need heroes to honor and admire; we need people after whom we can pattern our lives. For us Christ is the chiefest of these. . . . Christ is our pattern, our guide, our prototype, and our friend. We seek to be like him so that we can always be with him. In a lesser degree the apostles and prophets who have lived as Christ lived also become examples for us.⁹

Men in the scriptures, as well as the living prophets, can serve as role models for the rising generation. For example, in the Book of Mormon, there is no shortage of good men, and particularly, good fathers, like Lehi, Jacob, Alma, Mosiah, and Helaman. Throughout the Book of Mormon, the words of wise fathers often penetrated the hearts of humble sons (see 1 Nephi 8:12, 37–38; Enos 1:1–3; Helaman 5:6–12). Alma the Younger was certainly such a father. Besides leading and directing the affairs of the Church as a prophet and serving as the first elected chief judge, Alma also had a family to direct, minister to, and nurture. Alma appears to have understood the principle taught in the Doctrine and Covenants that just because an individual is a leader in the Church, they are not exempt from their parental duties to teach their children “light and truth” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:40). Alma was a wise father who taught his sons the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps he also understood that “fatherhood is leadership, the most important kind of leadership.”¹⁰

In this chapter, I will develop the concept of “intentional fatherhood” as viewed through the lens of Alma. Furthermore, I will provide some historical context to Alma as a father and discuss Alma’s practices as what I describe as “intentional fatherhood.”

Intentional Fatherhood

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf declared, “You cannot just float in the waters of life and trust that the current will take you wherever you hope to be one day.”¹¹ No one can become a successful father without trying to be. To be an intentional father is to live with purpose, focus, and intent. Intentional fathers have a plan; they are involved with their children, and they provide an environment for their children to thrive and be successful. Dr. William J. Doherty, a family therapist and professor at the University of Minnesota, has explained:

Sometimes with my therapy clients, I use an analogy of the Mississippi River, which flows just a couple of miles from my

office. I say that family life is like putting a canoe into that great body of water. If you enter the water at St. Paul and don't do anything, you will head south towards New Orleans. If you want to go north, or even stay at St. Paul, you have to work hard and have a plan. In the same way, if you get married or have a child without working a plan for your family's journey, you will likely head "south" toward less closeness, less meaning, and less joy over time. A family, like a canoe, must be steered or paddled, or it won't take you to where you want to go. The natural drift of family life in contemporary America is towards slowly diminishing connection, meaning, and community.¹²

Intentional fathers also must have a game plan, or they will end up wherever the river takes them in their parenting and family efforts. In our postmodern era, the natural drift is not family friendly. The rapids of wickedness, immorality, incivility, selfishness, and pride are washing contemporary children steadily downstream. Today, parents must have a proactive plan if they want to help steer their children toward happiness, success, and righteousness. The family proclamation reminds us that parents "have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, and to teach them to love and serve one another, observe the commandments of God, and be law-abiding citizens wherever they live."¹³

From the Book of Mormon, we can also learn the safe path down the river. Throughout this sacred book of scripture, the words of wise fathers often penetrated the hearts of humble sons. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland explained:

At a vulnerable moment in young Nephi's life, his prophetic future was determined when he said, "I did believe all the words which had been spoken by my father." At the turning point of the prophet Enos's life, he said it was "the words which I had often heard my father speak" which prompted

one of the great revelations recorded in the Book of Mormon. And sorrowing Alma the Younger, when confronted by the excruciating memory of his sins, “remembered also to have heard [his] father prophesy . . . concerning the coming of . . . Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.” That brief memory, that personal testimony offered by his father at a time when the father may have felt nothing was sinking in, not only saved the spiritual life of this, his son, but changed forever the history of the Book of Mormon people.¹⁴

Alma the Younger was certainly an intentional parent—he did not leave the way his children would turn out to chance. He desired to prepare his sons for a life of discipleship and citizenship. He was deliberate and purposeful in the way he taught and influenced his sons, Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton. He desired to equip his children with the doctrinal truths, practical life skills, and spiritual experiences that would help them survive and thrive in a wicked, sin-filled world.

A Righteous Leader and Father

Although much could be mentioned about Alma the Younger’s rebellious years and his conversion to the gospel, the scope of this paper will focus on Alma as a righteous adult, leader, and parent. Just as Brigham Young served as the governor of the Utah territory while simultaneously directing the Church as the president, Alma embraced similar positions. He served as the first chief judge in the land while concurrently leading the affairs of the Church as the high priest (Mosiah 29:41–42). As a leader, he walked in the ways of the Lord, kept the commandments, and judged righteously (Mosiah 29:43). He was a servant-leader who led his armies against the Amlicites in battle, fought with and killed Amlici, and sought to fight the king of the Lamanites (Alma 2:16, 29–32).

For a time, there was peace in the land of Zarahemla (Alma 4:1). The people were humbled because of their afflictions, and many joined the Church. As the chief judge, Alma personally baptized many of the thirty-five hundred who became members of the Church of God (4:4–5). However, it did not take long for the Nephites to turn their hearts toward pride, contention, and worldliness (4:6–9). During his tenure as chief judge, Alma “addressed difficulties such as the execution of Nehor, the revolt of Amlici, and a postwar economic slump.”¹⁵ As church members became more unrighteous, Alma appointed other leaders, such as teachers, priests, and elders, to preach to the people (4:7). Finally, Alma relinquished his judgment seat and appointed Nephiah to be the new chief judge (4:15–17).

At this juncture, Alma focused on being the spiritual leader of his people. As the high priest, he taught the people of Zarahemla true doctrine, preaching to them the “word of God . . . to stir them up in remembrance of their duty” and “bearing down in pure testimony against them” (Alma 4:19). Unfortunately, the people were slow to respond to Alma’s preaching. Therefore, he was grieved, afflicted, and saddened because of the “iniquity of his people.” Instead of responding to Alma’s message of repentance, they were “offended because of the strictness of the word.” Consequently, Alma’s heart was “exceedingly sorrowful” because his own people became unresponsive to his teachings and invitations to repentance (Alma 35:15).

Alma’s Focus on His Family

As Alma began to realize that he was having less impact on the members of the Church, he turned his focus from the Church to his family. He essentially circled the wagons and “caused that his sons should be gathered together, that he might give unto them every one his charge, separately, concerning the things pertaining unto righteousness” (Alma 35:16). Since Alma recognized that each of his sons had their own personalities, temperaments, convictions, inclinations, and missions, he customized his messages to each of them. Alma understood

the individual nature of each of his sons; therefore, the content of his sermons to them is unique. B. H. Roberts explained, “In each case, he is dealing with a [son] of somewhat different temperament; and each with a somewhat different life’s work before him from that of the others.”¹⁶ The need to provide customized counsel and direction to children is a principle that modern church leaders and family experts have come to understand more deeply over the years. For example, Elder James E. Faust declared, “Child rearing is so individualistic. Every child is different and unique. What works with one may not work with another.”¹⁷ Likewise, the renowned child psychologist Haim Ginott explained that children “need to be loved uniquely, not uniformly.”¹⁸ Alma, too, seemed to exemplify these principles and provided his sons with counsel that was tailor-made for them.

Furthermore, like many men of God at the close of their lives, Alma desired to draw his posterity together for some final instructions, warnings, challenges, and invitations. B. H. Roberts explained:

It was a custom with the old patriarchs in Israel, near the close of their lives, to call their children about them, prophesy what should befall them, or give them such charges, warnings and instructions as to them seemed necessary to their welfare. This Isaac did. Thus, too, did Jacob, and Moses, and doubtless many others of whom the Scriptures do not speak. The practice also obtained among the Nephites. Being of Israelitish descent, they would naturally perpetuate, in the land of promise to which they had been guided by the hand of God, a custom at once so beautiful and striking. Hence, Lehi, near life’s close, and doubtless many others, called about them their sons, and instructed and blessed them.¹⁹

Douglas Clark and Robert Clark, authors of *Fathers and Sons in the Book of Mormon*, postulated that “Alma’s instructions to his sons as recorded in chapters 36 through 42 must qualify as the single most important event of his ministry, comprising as they do at least 20 percent of the entire account thereof. This material is also the largest

passage of fatherly counsel by any father in the Book of Mormon.”²⁰ No recorded father in the Book of Mormon gave more precise, direct, deep, and relevant counsel to his sons than Alma.²¹ Furthermore, the counsel Alma gave to his sons is timeless and surprisingly applicable for contemporary families. Undoubtedly, “The Book of Mormon . . . was written for our day. The Nephites never had the book; neither did the Lamanites of ancient times. It was meant for us.”²²

Alma as an Intentional Father

Elder Christofferson declared, “Perhaps the most essential of a father’s work is to turn the hearts of his children to their Heavenly Father.”²³ Alma appears to have understood that charge and took his paternal responsibilities seriously (compare Doctrine and Covenants 68:25–28; Doctrine and Covenants 93:42).

Alma was certainly an intentional father. He was deliberate in the way he taught and influenced his sons. He desired to prepare his sons for their life missions here on earth and to help each of them reach their full potential. Many of the practices that Alma engaged in as a father have relevance and application for contemporary parents. The following is a description of seven specific practices, as taught by Alma, that contemporary fathers should consider.

Practice 1: Alma testified of the truthfulness of the gospel to his sons (Alma 36:1–5; 38:6–10)

President Ezra Taft Benson taught, “In the Book of Mormon, faithful fathers constantly bore their testimonies to their sons.”²⁴ Alma certainly was a father who testified often to Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton. For example, Alma declared to Shiblon, “Now, my son, I would not that ye should think that I know these things of myself, but it is the Spirit of God which is in me which maketh these things known unto me” (Alma 38:6). Alma understood the atonement of Jesus Christ. He turned his sons toward the Savior as the source of redemption. He taught Helaman, “Ye ought to know as I do know”

(36:30). Alma wanted to help his sons understand his deep feelings and convictions about the gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason, he did not shy away from sharing his own heartbreaks and difficulties. In Alma 36, Alma testified to Helaman with the following expressions:

- ✦ “I swear unto you” (36:1)
- ✦ “Learn of me; for I do know” (36:3)
- ✦ “I know of myself” (36:4)
- ✦ “God has, by the mouth of his holy angel, made these things known unto me” (36:5)
- ✦ “And have tasted as I have tasted” (36:26)
- ✦ “And have seen eye to eye as I have seen” (36:26)
- ✦ “They do know these things of which I have spoken” (36:26)
- ✦ “I do know” (36:26)
- ✦ “I know that he will raise me up at the last day” (36:28)
- ✦ “Ye ought to know as I do know” (36:30)

Alma’s deliberate testimony to his sons is one of the most powerful patriarchal examples in the Book of Mormon. Alma did not hesitate to declare the source of his blessings. He told Shiblon, “Now, my son, I would not that ye should think that I know these things of myself, but it is the Spirit of God which is in me which maketh these things known unto me; for if I had not been born of God I should not have known these things (Alma 38:6; see 38:9). He also wanted his sons to learn from his mistakes. He told Helaman, “I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins” (Alma 36:12). John W. Welch explained, “We are the great beneficiaries of Alma’s remarkable candor about his own mistakes and successes. Alma spoke as a personal witness and bore personal testimony of the things that he had experienced and learned.”²⁵

Alma also desired to teach his sons by following the promptings of the Holy Ghost (Alma 39:12; 40:1; 41:1; 42:1). As he followed the Spirit, Alma was able to give customized counsel to each of

his sons—much like a patriarchal blessing. The Spirit of the Lord prompted Alma to command his children to do good (39:12). When Alma was teaching Corianton, he began Alma 40 with “I *perceive* that thy mind is worried” (40:1; emphasis added throughout). In the next chapter, Alma commenced his sermon with “I *perceive* that thy mind has been worried” (41:1). Similarly, Alma 42 begins with the phrase “I *perceive* there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind” (42:1). In each case, when Alma “perceived,” he was being prompted by the Spirit what he should teach his son Corianton.

Alma understood the importance of sharing his witness of the truth with his children—something Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught years later: “We [parents] do two things: we teach and we testify. We have to teach first so that we will have a basis for testimony. We don’t just bear testimony promiscuously; we bear testimony to back up teaching. [Parents] teach and testify.”²⁶ With his sons, Alma shared his testimony and his experiences with his own conversion. Likewise, many parents today could improve in sharing their testimonies with their children. Children raised in Latter-day Saint homes should hear their parents testify of the truthfulness of the gospel often. Elder David A. Bednar asked in general conference, “Parents, when was the last time you declared your witness to your children about the things you know to be true? And children, when was the last time you shared your testimony with your parents and family? . . . Our testimonies are proclaimed and lived most powerfully in our own homes.”²⁷ An intentional father will share his testimony around the family fireside but also during one-on-one occasions with his children. There should be both formal and informal settings in home life where testimony bearing should take place. Moreover, intentional fathers will seek the Spirit, strive to be worthy of it, and be guided and directed in what to teach their children.

Practice 2: Alma connected his sons to their ancestry
 (Alma 36:2; 37:2–8; 38:6–10)

Alma understood the benefit of connecting his sons to their family history. He also emphasized important lessons from the past. For example, he taught his sons about the deliverance of their fathers (Alma 26:2), the instruction of his progenitors regarding the safeguarding of the plates (Alma 37:4), and how the sacred records blessed their forebears (37:9). In fact, the word *fathers*, which can be interpreted as “ancestors,” is mentioned fourteen times in Alma 36–37 alone. Alma taught his sons both their spiritual identity and their biological identity.

Several years ago, at a training session with General Authorities, the question was asked, “How can we help those struggling with pornography?” Elder Russell M. Nelson stood and stated, “Teach them their identity and purpose.”²⁸ Alma well understood the benefits of teaching his sons their identity, purpose, and heritage. In our day, modern apostles have promised the members of the Church incredible blessings as they engage in learning about their ancestors. Elder Richard G. Scott promised the youth of the Church, “Do you young people want a sure way to eliminate the influence of the adversary in your life? Immerse yourself in searching for your ancestors.”²⁹ Similarly, Elder Bednar promised the youth of the Church that if they would engage in family history work, their love for their ancestors would increase, their love for the Savior would deepen, and they would be protected against the adversary.³⁰

The counsel given to Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton from their father is timeless. The more we can connect modern youth to their identity and spiritual heritage, the more we help insulate them from “the fiery darts of the adversary” (1 Nephi 15:24).

Practice 3: Alma set a righteous example for his sons
 (Alma 36:2)

Alma set a righteous example as he kept the commandments of God and sought for light and truth. He taught Helaman, “Ye should do

as I have done” (Alma 36:2). Other scriptures where Alma presents himself as an example to his children include the following:

- ✦ “Learn of me” (36:3)
- ✦ “Ye also ought to retain in remembrance, as I have done” (36:29)
- ✦ “For ye ought to know as I do know” (36:30)
- ✦ “Keep all these things sacred which I have kept” (37:2)

Furthermore, although Alma had made serious mistakes in his life, he had been through the repentance process and had experienced the joy of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Even so, he had no qualms about sharing with his sons his mistakes and his triumphs. Even though he had lived the life of an abhorrent sinner, by the prime of his life he was striving for discipleship and was a consecrated follower of Jesus Christ (Alma 36:17). Alma had been born again (36:23; 38:6), and his sons knew of his spiritual journey perhaps better than anyone else.

President Thomas S. Monson admonished, “To you who are fathers of boys . . . I say, strive to be the kind of example boys need.”³¹ Clark and Clark have eloquently explained, “For it is one thing to say, ‘Go yonder,’ and quite another to say, ‘Follow me.’ The latter invitation not only shows the path is passable, but also conveys a sense of comfort and community and of traveling the path together. But it can also be the better part of wisdom for a parent to say, ‘Avoid that—for I have been there, and know.’”³² It is vital that contemporary parents also set a righteous example for their children. Brigham Young taught, “Parents should govern their children by faith rather than by the rod, leading them kindly by good example into all truth and holiness.”³³ On another occasion, Brother Brigham taught parents that they should never permit themselves to do anything that they “are not willing to see [their] children do. We should set them an example that we wish them to imitate.”³⁴ As parents, we all are imperfect. We all are in need of the enabling and cleansing power of the atonement of Jesus Christ. Like Alma, regardless of our spiritual station in life,

intentional fathers will teach their children to turn to the Savior for support, strength, and healing.

Practice 4: Alma gave his sons specific counsel on how to carry out their duties and responsibilities (Alma 37:2, 6–8, 10–20; 38:1)

Alma helped his sons understand the importance of work, of fulfilling their responsibilities and their church duties. For instance, he gave direct counsel to Helaman on how to care for the sacred records (Alma 37:1–7). Alma gave Shiblon some specific directives on how to be an effective missionary (Alma 38:11–14). He taught Corianton not only about how to repent, but also about the plan of salvation (Alma 39–42). President George Q. Cannon explained, “Those boys who are taken into companionship and fellowship with their fathers, and gradually initiated into ways of doing business, entrusted according to their capability with the management of important transactions, and instructed how to achieve results—such boys will almost certainly pass, with no unpleasant transition, from boyhood to manhood.”³⁵ Intentional fathers, with their spouses, accept the sacred duty to be the primary teachers of their children. President Joseph F. Smith instructed parents, “Do not let your children out to specialists . . . but teach them by your own precept and example, by your own fireside.”³⁶ It is certainly not the duty of the Church or others to teach our children their responsibilities or to teach them the gospel. Alma taught that this sacred charge lies squarely on the shoulders of parents.

Practice 5: Alma called his sons to repentance (Alma 36:2; 37:13; 38:11–15; 39–42)

As a father, Alma was not afraid to give counsel, correction, and an occasional rebuke. He reminded Helaman, “How strict are the commandments of God. . . . If ye will keep my [God’s] commandments ye shall prosper in the land” (Alma 37:13). He also warned Helaman, “If ye transgress the commandments of God, behold, these things which

are sacred shall be taken away from you by the power of God, and ye shall be delivered up unto Satan" (37:15). On another occasion, Alma warned Shiblon about the temptations of pride and boasting and counseled him to bridle his passions (Alma 38:11–12). Perhaps Alma was the most direct and bold with Corianton, who had committed some form of sexual transgression while serving as a missionary. Alma was undeviating when he explained to Corianton the nature of his transgression and the consequences that would certainly follow if he did not repent (Alma 39:1–9). With confidence and simplicity, Alma declared to his wayward son, "Ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day" (39:8). Elder Christofferson explained, "When a father provides correction, his motivation must be love and his guide the Holy Spirit."³⁷ Alma possessed both love and the Spirit—especially as he taught Corianton.

However, Alma was not permissive in his parenting; instead, he was a fearless parent who would always stand for the truth. Compared to Eli in the Old Testament, who did not discipline his sons, Alma confronted Corianton about his lack of diligence in keeping the commandments (1 Samuel 2:22–25, 27–34; Alma 39:2). Elder Neal A. Maxwell stated, "I have no hesitancy, brothers and sisters, in stating that unless checked, permissiveness, by the end of its journey, will cause humanity to stare in mute disbelief at its awful consequences."³⁸ Alma understood the consequences of "unchecked permissiveness." Modern parents would do well to follow the example of Alma in his proactive fathering role. Intentional fathers cannot be afraid to stand for the truth and to defend it, regardless of the consequences. Intentional fathers would rather call their children to repentance with love and tenderness than have them live in the great and spacious building (1 Nephi 8:26).

Practice 6: Alma built up his sons and praised them for their accomplishments (Alma 38:2–3; 39:10)

President Benson taught, "I am convinced that before a child can be influenced for good by his or her parents, there must be a demonstration

of respect and love.”³⁹ Alma understood that he could not effectively teach his sons unless he had a relationship with them. Perhaps he also knew that rules without relationship often leads to rebellion. One way that Alma connected with his sons was by pointing out their strengths and complimenting them. For example, Alma told Shiblon,

- ✦ “I trust that I shall have great joy in you, because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God” (Alma 38:2)
- ✦ “As you have commenced in your youth to look to the Lord your God, even so I hope that you will continue in keeping his commandments” (38:2)
- ✦ “I have had great joy in thee already, because of thy faithfulness and thy diligence, and thy patience and thy long-suffering” (38:3)

Alma also encouraged Corianton to be nourished by his brothers and to give heed to their counsel (Alma 39:10). That may have been an indirect way of complimenting Helaman and Shiblon.

President Benson explained, “In the Book of Mormon, loving fathers commended their sons when they deserved it.”⁴⁰ Alma understood that intentional fathers praise their children and build them up. He did this by giving them lofty responsibilities and by complimenting them. Brigham Young admonished fathers to treat their families “as an angel would treat them.”⁴¹ Contemporary fathers would do well to follow Alma’s example of intentional parenting and the instruction of President Benson, who taught, “Praise your children more than you correct them. Praise them for even their smallest achievement.”⁴²

Practice 7: Alma taught his sons true doctrine
(Alma 36:1; 37:13, 33–47; 38:1, 11–15; 39:3–10; 40–42)

Elder A. Theodore Tuttle once asked:

How would you pass the test, parents, if your family was isolated from the Church and you had to supply all religious

training? Have you become so dependent on others that you do little or nothing at home? Tell me, how much of the gospel would your children know if all they knew is what they had been taught at home? Ponder that. I repeat, how much of the gospel would your children know if all they knew is what they had been taught at home?⁴³

Elder Tuttle's question could be haunting for some parents. How much of the gospel would our children understand if all they knew is what we, as parents, taught them in the home? President Benson wrote, "What did the righteous fathers of the Book of Mormon teach their sons? They taught them many things, but the overarching message was 'the great plan of the Eternal God'—the Fall, rebirth, Atonement, Resurrection, Judgment, eternal life (see Alma 34:9)."⁴⁴ Alma understood that his primary role was to teach his children the ways of the Lord, the plan of salvation, and the doctrine of Christ. Some of Alma's powerful teachings include the following:

- ✦ Trust in God (36:5)
- ✦ Forgiveness comes through the atonement of Jesus Christ (36:18–19; 38:8)
- ✦ God will support us in our trials, troubles, and afflictions (36:27; 38:5)
- ✦ If you keep the commandments, you will prosper (36:1, 30; 37:13; 38:1)
- ✦ God fulfills all of his words (37:16)
- ✦ Preach repentance and faith on the Lord, Jesus Christ (37:33)
- ✦ Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings (37:37)
- ✦ Strip yourselves of pride (38:11)
- ✦ Repent and forsake your sins (39:11)
- ✦ The plan of salvation (40–42).

Long before Elder Boyd K. Packer taught it, Alma understood that "true doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The

study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.”⁴⁵ When Corianton became involved in immoral behavior, Alma didn’t merely teach him about the consequences of his poor choices. He taught him the doctrines of the gospel—the plan of salvation and redemption, the resurrection, and the atonement (Alma 40–42). Years ago, Elder Maxwell pointed out, “Doctrines believed and practiced do change and improve us, while ensuring our vital access to the Spirit. Both outcomes are crucial.”⁴⁶ Intentional fathers teach their children the doctrines of the gospel to fortify them and protect them from the evil and toxic environment where they reside. The doctrines of the gospel *can* and *will* protect our children.

Conclusion

Nephi taught, “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). Remember, Alma also taught that “the preaching of the word had a great tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5). There is power in God’s word.

Alma’s counsel is timeless as contemporary parents are also trying to raise their children in a toxic world. The doctrinal truths that Alma preached can help youth and parents resist temptation and draw closer to the Savior Jesus Christ. Alma’s teachings to his sons can provide modern parents with the tools and doctrines needed to navigate the obstacles and challenges of adolescence and young adulthood. As modern fathers immerse themselves in the teachings of Alma 36–42, they will be inspired how to teach, direct, and interact with their own children. They will also learn to be intentional parents—being proactive in leading and teaching their families the doctrines of the gospel.

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Notes

1. See Robert D. Hales, "The Eternal Family," *Ensign*, November 1996, 64–66.
2. See L. Tom Perry, "Fatherhood, an Eternal Calling," *Ensign*, May 2004, 69–72.
3. See, for example, David C. Dollahite, "Fathering, Faith, and Spirituality," *Journal of Men's Studies* 7, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 3–15.
4. David Popenoe, *Life without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 8.
5. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (2000), 134.
6. D. Todd Christofferson, "Fathers," *Ensign*, May 2016, 93–94.
7. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 2010, 129.
8. Since the year 2000, there have been twenty-six talks in general conference addressing fatherhood.
9. Spencer W. Kimball, "Preparing for Service in the Church," *Ensign*, May 1979, 47.
10. The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "A Message from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (pamphlet, 1973), reprinted as "Father, Consider Your Ways" in the *Ensign*, June 2002, 16.
11. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "A Yearning for Home," *Ensign*, November 2017, 24.
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