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One by One: The Fifth Gospel’s Model of Service

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The New Testament portrays Jesus Christ’s mortal work as a mission not only to large groups but also to individuals. The Gospel narratives indicate that in many cases there was direct physical contact between Jesus and individuals as He ministered among the people. For example, when He healed Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever, Jesus “*touched* her hand” (Matthew 8:14–15; emphasis added; see also Mark 1:30–31; Luke 4:38–39). Jesus again “put forth his hand, and *touched*” a man with leprosy to make him whole (Matthew 8:1–3; emphasis added). He touched the eyes of two blind men as He healed them (see Matthew 9:27–31). He healed deafness and a speech impediment when He put His fingers “into” a man’s ears (Mark 7:32–37). He “put his hands upon” a blind man (Mark 8:22–26). He healed a demoniac child when He “took him by the hand and lifted him up” (Mark 9:14–29; see also Matthew 17:14–21; Luke 9:37–43). The Savior healed Jarius’ daughter when He “took her by the hand” and raised her from the dead (Matthew 9:23–26; see also Mark 5:35–42; Luke 8:49–55). The New Testament Gospels record many more miracles in which direct physical contact may have been possible. ^[1]

Occasionally, individuals reached out to touch the Savior, as was the case when the woman with an issue of blood “*touched* the border of his garment” (see Luke 8:43–46; emphasis added). In some instances, however, there was more involved than the simple act of touching. In the case of the woman just cited, Jesus said He knew “that virtue is gone out of me” (Luke 8:46). Joseph Smith explained that “the virtue here referred to is the spirit of life” and that we sometimes become weakened when giving blessings. ^[2] These remarks by Jesus and Joseph Smith imply a transfer of power in such ministrations.

According to Mark and Luke, Jesus often healed not merely by touching the individual but through a more formal laying on of hands (see Mark 5:23; 6:5; 7:32; 8:22–25; Luke 4:40; 13:13), and He enjoined the disciples to do the same (see Mark 16:18). Healing was also often conveyed through this laying on of hands in the post-Resurrection Church (see Acts 9:12, 17; 28:8). Jesus also blessed children by laying hands on them (see Mark 10:13–16). *Laying on of hands* has a distinct meaning and purpose in the Bible. Authority or power was not passed literally through the arms and hands to the individual, but laying on of hands was a symbolic representation of who or what was the focus of the ritual action. The Old Testament usage of laying on of hands related to sacrifice and succession in office. In the New Testament, it was associated with healing, with baptism with the Holy Spirit, and with assignment to specific administrative tasks in the Church. All the examples mentioned in the New Testament of the laying on of hands have the following underlying unifying characteristics: the context is always sacred, as frequent mention of prayer shows, and in each instance something is achieved through the practice, even though the laying on of hands is a symbolic action.

3 Nephi—The Fifth Gospel

Third Nephi, sometimes referred to as the fifth Gospel in Latter-day Saint circles, describes Christ’s post-Resurrection ministry to the Nephites in terms similar to those used in the four New Testament Gospels. It emphasizes the individual experiences of the Nephite people with the resurrected Messiah, noting their direct physical contact with Him as well as His laying on of hands as the symbolic act of transmitting authority and power. In addition, various forms of the word *minister* are used in connection with these experiences. In his introduction to the appearance narrative, Mormon states, “Behold, I will show unto you that the people . . . did have great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon their heads, insomuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them—showing his body unto them, and *ministering* unto them; and an account of his *ministry* shall be given hereafter” (3 Nephi 10:18–19; emphasis added).

The Book of Mormon account of Jesus’ ministry among the Nephites sharpens our understanding of the principle of service by showing how true disciples should minister to others. That account is clearer and more precise than the New Testament account on many points relating to the Gospel. It focuses not only on the words of Jesus (doctrine) but also on His actions (application of the doctrines). By the power of Christ, Mormon saw into the future—our day (see Mormon 3:16–22). It therefore seems fair to assume that He carefully selected material to provide lessons

rooted in our own situation. After Jesus revealed Himself to the Nephites, He taught by word and example the correlation among individual experience, touching (laying on of hands in many cases), and ministry. The Book of Mormon uses the term *minister* and its variants to mean both giving individual attention and symbolically transferring power through touching or the laying on of hands.

When Christ appeared to the ancient inhabitants of America, He invited them to “thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:14). All the people gathered at the temple in Bountiful “went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet” (3 Nephi 11:15), and when they had brought their sick and afflicted and their children, there were as many as 2,500 people (see 3 Nephi 17:25). To emphasize the experience, Mormon states, “And this they did do, going forth *one by one* until they had all gone forth [until they all saw] with their eyes and did feel with their hands” (3 Nephi 11:15; emphasis added). The cumulative effect of the personal experience left them all worshipping Jesus and crying, “Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God!” (3 Nephi 11:17).

Ordinances One by One

The resurrected Savior then taught that holy ordinances were to be performed individually. He detailed the procedure for performing the ordinance of baptism:

“Verily I say unto you that whoso repenteth of his sins through your words, and desireth to be baptized in my name, on this wise shall ye baptize them—Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name shall ye baptize them.

“And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying:

“Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

“And then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water” (3 Nephi 11:23–26).

It is significant that each person was to be specifically called by name and then immersed individually in the water by the one performing the ordinance.

Nephi baptized the disciples in the manner prescribed—one by one. The record states,

“And it came to pass that Nephi went down into the water and was baptized. And he came up out of the water and began to baptize. And he baptized all those whom Jesus had chosen” (3 Nephi 19:11–12). The Book of Mormon confirms that those baptized were ministered to further: “And it came to pass when they were all baptized and had come up out of the water, the Holy Ghost did fall upon them, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost and with fire. And behold, they were encircled about as if it were by fire; and it came down from heaven, and the multitude did witness it, and did bear record; and angels did come down out of heaven and did *minister* unto them. And it came to pass that while the angels were *ministering* unto the disciples, behold, Jesus came and stood in the midst and *ministered* unto them” (3 Nephi 19:13–15; emphasis added).

Like the New Testament paradigm (see Mark 1:31; 15:41; Luke 8:3), ministry in the Book of Mormon appears to be something spontaneous. As the disciples baptized others, each believer received the gift of the Holy Spirit and was further ministered unto.

Christ also blessed the sick among the Nephites as He had done during His mortal ministry in the Holy Land: “For I perceive that ye desire that I should show unto you what I have done unto your brethren at Jerusalem, for I see that your faith is sufficient that I should heal you” (3 Nephi 17:8). The sacred record continues, “And it came to pass that when he had thus spoken, all the multitude, with one accord, did go forth with their sick and their afflicted, and their lame, and with their blind, and with their dumb, and with all them that were afflicted in any manner; and he did heal them every one as they were brought forth unto him” (3 Nephi 17:9). It seems reasonable to assume that the Savior had power to heal all present among the Nephites without their being brought forth to Him. Even before His resurrection, the Savior healed people in groups without touching them and was able to heal those not within a specific proximity to Himself (see Mark 7:24–30; Luke 7:1–9). The Lord chose among the Nephites, however, to have the sick brought close to Him, and as the record implies, He touched each one personally.

Following this great healing occasion, Jesus commanded the people to bring “their little children and set them down upon the ground round about him.” Then “he took their little children, *one by one*, and blessed them, and prayed unto the Father for them.

“And when he had done this he wept again;

“And he spake unto the multitude, and said unto them: Behold your little ones.

“And as they looked to behold they cast their eyes towards heaven, and they saw the heavens open, and they saw

angels descending out of heaven as it were in the midst of fire; and they came down and encircled those little ones about, and they were encircled about with fire; and the angels did *minister* unto them” (3 Nephi 17:12, 21–24; emphasis added).

The book of 3 Nephi continues to record the words and deeds of Christ as He instructed the disciples regarding the sacrament. “And this shall ye do . . . , which I have shown unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you” (3 Nephi 18:7). He gave similar instructions regarding the cup of wine (see 3 Nephi 18:11). A day later, Jesus provided bread and wine miraculously and again administered the sacrament unto the people (see 3 Nephi 20:1–9). Both sacramental experiences included the giving of bread and wine to each individual.

After Jesus instituted the sacrament among the Nephites, He gave the disciples power to confer the Holy Ghost: “And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of these sayings, he *touched* with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, *one by one*, even until he had *touched* them all, and spake unto them as *he touched* them” (3 Nephi 18:36; emphasis added). Although the multitude did not hear what Jesus said, the disciples “bare record that he gave them power to give the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 18:37).

Though it is probable that Jesus ordained the New Testament apostles through the laying on of hands, the present New Testament text does not allude to that event, nor is there evidence that Matthias was assigned Judas’ place among the Twelve through the laying on of hands. Here again, the fifth Gospel highlights Jesus’ actions and clarifies the New Testament procedure of calling and ordaining the Twelve to minister. Moroni adds to our understanding of their calling:

“The words of Christ, which he spake unto his disciples, the twelve whom he had chosen, as he laid his hands upon them—

“And he called them by name, saying: Ye shall call on the Father in my name, in mighty prayer; and after ye have done this ye shall have power that to him upon whom ye shall lay your hands, ye shall give the Holy Ghost; and in my name shall ye give it, for thus do mine apostles. Now Christ spake these words unto them at the time of his first appearing; and the multitude heard it not, but the disciples heard it; and on as many as they laid their hands, fell the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 2:1–3).

The Nephite Disciples’ Ministry

In the New Testament period, Jesus chose His own disciples (see John 6:70; 15:16, 19). Likewise, in the Book of Mormon account, it is Christ who initiated the call to ministry (see 3 Nephi 11:18–22; 12:1; 18:36). This point was emphasized when Jesus said, while looking on the newly called twelve, “For behold, ye are they whom I have chosen to *minister* unto these people” (3 Nephi 13:25; emphasis added). Once called, the Lord touched the disciples individually as they began a ministry similar to what Jesus had already done among them:

“And it came to pass that when Jesus had made an end of these sayings, *he touched* with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, one by one, even until he had *touched* them all, and spake unto them as *he touched* them. . . .

“And it came to pass that when Jesus had touched them all, there came a cloud and overshadowed the multitude” (3 Nephi 18:36, 38; emphasis added).

Thus, a conceptual thread weaves together the themes of calling, touching, and laying on of hands (see 3 Nephi 17:24; 19:14).

The disciples’ ministry was not limited to the righteous; but a ministry to the “unworthy” was also enjoined by the Savior. Although strict commandments were given to those administering the holy ordinances regarding the need for holiness in receiving such blessings, the Lord stated concerning the unworthy, “Ye shall not cast him out from among you, but ye shall *minister* unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father, in my name.” When the individual came forward with a broken heart and contrite spirit, then the true disciple was to “*minister* unto him of my flesh and blood” (3 Nephi 18:30; emphasis added). Even if a person continued in an unrepentant state, Christ commanded that “ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues, or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to *minister*; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart” (3 Nephi 18:32; emphasis added). Taking the model of ministering to the physically infirm, the Lord applied the same principle to the spiritually infirm; the disciples should bring them to Jesus, who promised, “I shall heal them” (3 Nephi 18:32).

Almost immediately thereafter, Jesus “departed from them, and ascended into heaven” (3 Nephi 18:39). When the people left for their homes, “it was noised abroad among the people immediately, before it was yet dark, that the multitude had seen Jesus, and that he had *ministered* unto them, and that he would also show himself on the morrow unto the multitude” (3 Nephi 19:2; emphasis added). On the following day, the numbers grew “so great that [the disciples] did cause that they should be separated into twelve bodies” (3 Nephi 19:5). Mormon summarizes the experience:

“Therefore, I would that ye should behold that the Lord truly did teach the people, for the space of three days; and after that he did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them.

“And it came to pass that he did teach and *minister* unto the children of the multitude of whom hath been spoken. . . .

“And it came to pass that after he had ascended into heaven—the second time that he showed himself unto them . . . after having healed all their sick, and their lame, and opened the eyes of their blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf, and even had done all manner of cures among them, and raised a man from the dead, and had shown forth his power unto them. . . .

“Behold, it came to pass on the morrow that the multitude gathered themselves together. . . .

“And it came to pass that the disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and to teach as many as did come unto them; and as many as were baptized in the name of Jesus were filled with the Holy Ghost. . . .

“And they taught, and did *minister* one to another; and they had all things common among them, every man dealing justly, one with another.

“And it came to pass that they did do all things even as Jesus had commanded them.

“And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ” (3 Nephi 26:13–17, 19–21; emphasis added).

On a later visit with the Nephite disciples, the Savior spake unto them “*one by one*” and asked each one, “What is it that ye desire of me, after that I am gone to the Father?” (3 Nephi 28:1; emphasis added). Nine of them responded, “We desire that after we have lived unto the age of man, that our *ministry*, wherein thou hast called us, may have an end, that we may speedily come unto thee in thy kingdom” (3 Nephi 28:2; emphasis added). The remaining three desired to stay on the earth and continue their labors until Jesus would come again. Then He “*touched* every one of them with his finger save it were the three who were to tarry, and then he departed” (3 Nephi 28:12; emphasis added). These three were then miraculously “caught up into heaven,” but when they returned to earth they “did again *minister* upon the face of the earth” (3 Nephi 28:13, 16; emphasis added).

These special disciples, Mormon indicates, “did go forth upon the face of the land, and did *minister* unto all the people” (3 Nephi 28:18; emphasis added). Nearly four hundred years later, Mormon testified that He knew they were still on earth: “I have seen them, and they have *ministered* unto me” (3 Nephi 28:26; emphasis added). He notes that their mission would be among Jews and Gentiles, where “they shall *minister* unto all the scattered tribes of Israel, and unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people” (3 Nephi 28:29; emphasis added).

The disciples of Jesus were to duplicate the experiences they had shared with Christ: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the thing that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do” (3 Nephi 27:21).

Mormon introduces the entire appearance narrative (see the note before 3 Nephi 11) with these words, “Jesus Christ did show himself unto the people of Nephi, as the multitude were gathered together in the land Bountiful, and did *minister* unto them” (emphasis added). According to Mormon’s introduction, Jesus did two things: first, He showed Himself to the people, and second, He ministered unto them. Ministering was obviously an essential element of the visit of Christ among the Nephites.

Conclusion

During His New Testament labors, Jesus often addressed multitudes and performed miracles among them. On many occasions He spoke directly to individuals, and in several cases He touched them and healed them. But in several instances, He laid His hands on people, symbolizing the action taken to the individual. The 3 Nephi record replicates and emphasizes Christ’s New Testament model of ministry by words and deeds.

According to the Book of Mormon model, ministering often occurs “one by one” as disciples come in contact with the Savior and with one another. In many cases a personal “touch” is a symbolic means of transmitting God’s love and power to an individual. In several instances, however, the touch is another way of expressing that hands were laid upon an individual. The context of these several examples among the Nephites seems to indicate that an ordinance is being performed by the *laying on of hands* (see 3 Nephi 18:36). Being chosen to minister is also a call to serve innocent and pure children and the faithful Saints, just as Jesus and the angels did during His appearance among the Nephites.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we should recognize that Jesus swept away the legalistic regulations of the Mosaic code and touched those who had been considered “untouchable” under the law (see 3 Nephi 17:7, see also Leviticus 13; 3 Nephi 15:2–9). He commanded the Nephite disciples to do the same and encouraged them to invite everyone to join with them in worship as they ministered to one another. Likewise, for the modern believer, a call to discipleship is more than just joining a study class. It is a call to perform the work of the Lord and His angels spontaneously, to minister as a

servant among mortals. In particular, it is a call to serve the physically, mentally, emotionally, economically, and spiritually infirm, modern society's "untouchables." These individuals should not be "cast out from among" us but should be ministered to and touched by true disciples, as Jesus demonstrated. Through the ordinances of the gospel performed individually, and as prescribed by the resurrected Savior by His chosen disciples, "the power of godliness is manifest" (D&C 84:20).

[\[1\]](#) See Matthew 8:28–32; 9:2–8; 20:30–34; Mark 1:21–28; 5:1–20; 10:46–52; Luke 4:31–37; 6:6–11; 7:11–17; 8:26–36; 11:14; 13:11–13; 14:1–4; 18:35–43; 22:50–51; John 5:1–9; and 9:1–17.

[\[2\]](#) Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 281.