



Alma, Arise, by Walter Rane, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Repentant persons will find that a terrible load of guilt is removed and replaced with courage as they continue their journey through other principles of repentance.

# *A Simple but Powerful Path to Forgiveness (Alma 36)*

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As children of our Heavenly Father, we come to this earth to be tested—to prove that we will do the things he commands us to do (see Abraham 3:25). Inevitably, we fall short. But through faith in Jesus Christ, we can repent and become clean again so that we may return to God’s presence. The Father’s plan of happiness invites his children to seek his Son with faith, even “faith unto repentance [to bring] about the great and eternal plan of redemption” (Alma 34:16).

Throughout the Book of Mormon, we see example after example of Lehi’s seed falling short, repenting, and returning to the Savior’s ways. In like manner, holy prophets in the ancient Americas preached the Father’s plan, that they might “be an instrument in the hands of God to bring some soul to repentance” (Alma 29:9).

Alma 36 is a message to all of God’s children that uses Alma the Younger’s personal experience to teach essential principles of repentance. Alma emphasizes that faith in Jesus Christ and his Atonement is the only way humankind can be saved from their sins. Alma 36 also highlights the joy of not only being worthy but also feeling worthy in the presence of God.

## Alma's Personal Experience

Mosiah 27 includes the story of Alma the Younger's rebellion against his father's teachings as he strove to destroy the church until an angel commanded him to repent. As part of Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, Mormon identifies Alma as a member of "the rising generation" in King Mosiah's day (Mosiah 26:1). The "rising generation" did not believe in the coming of Christ and could not understand the word of God; therefore, their hearts were hardened (see 26:2–3).

The writing style of Mormon's abridgment in Mosiah 27 is consistent with his writings throughout the Book of Mormon. He usually shares events in order to help the reader see or learn a spiritual lesson from them. This is most obviously highlighted with his common phrase "and thus we see." Speaking to the eventual readers of the Book of Mormon, Mormon offers a simple narration of Alma's rebellion in Mosiah 27. He explains the setting, names specific people (in this case Alma the Younger and the four sons of King Mosiah—Ammon, Aaron, Omni, and Himni), states details of events that led these young men to repentance and forgiveness, and finally punctuates the events with a profound lesson and valuable conclusion for the latter-day readers: "And thus they were instruments in the hands of God in bringing many to the knowledge of the truth" (Mosiah 27:36).

Approximately twenty years later in the abridged record, Mormon repeats the same experience of Alma striving to destroy the Church and having an angel appear to him: "If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God" (Alma 36:9). Why would Mormon include this same event within a hundred pages of the first account? Perhaps Mormon has a broader message in this second rendition.

## Alma 36: A Pattern for Teaching Repentance

Using Alma's personal account, Mormon outlines universal principles of repentance. In what appears to be his own words, Alma clearly describes the simple principles he followed to repent of serious sins, shares his powerful witness of forgiveness, and declares his subsequent commitment to serve God the remainder of his days.

### *Chiasmus in Alma 36*

Interestingly, Alma relates his repentance experience in this chapter in the ancient Hebrew style of writing called chiasmus, a useful style to emphasize

that faith in Jesus Christ and his Atonement is essential for proper and complete repentance. It seems that Mormon preserves Alma's unique presentation in chiasmus and engraves it on the plates of Mormon without any changes. Jack Welch notes, "Chiasmus is a style of writing known in antiquity and used by many ancient and some modern writers. It consists of arranging a series of words or ideas in one order, and then repeating it in reverse order. . . . Furthermore, the main idea of the passage is placed at the turning point where the second half begins, which emphasizes it."<sup>1</sup>

The appendix to this paper illustrates the series of ideas taught in Alma 36, presented in sequence and then repeated in reverse order. The turning point occurs in verses 17 and 18 and emphasizes the main idea or climax to true repentance. So which doctrinal principles act as the climax, as taught in these two verses? Alma remembers the teachings of his father, the prophet, about "one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world" (Alma 36:17). Then Alma exercises his faith and turns to his Savior, crying, "O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me" (36:18).

Clearly, our faith in Jesus Christ and his Atonement is what makes possible the forgiveness of our sins; it is the only way to become clean from our transgressions. The prophet Nephi declares, "There is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God" (2 Nephi 31:21). Similar to other signs and types that direct us toward Jesus Christ, the literary style of chiasmus reminds the repentant soul that *it is essential* to exercise faith in the Holy Messiah to receive a remission of sins. There is no other way.

### *Power of Doctrine in Alma 36*

As interesting and remarkable as chiasmus is in Alma 36, the real power of this chapter is found in the *doctrine* of repentance taught by Alma to his son Helaman. This real power is manifest as Alma teaches eternal truths that apply to latter-day readers, as the readers liken these principles to their own lives, and as Alma's promise of experiencing the blessings of joy and forgiveness demonstrate God's love for all his children.

Alma 36 reveals that a repentant soul not only is clean but also *feels* clean; a repentant soul's confidence shall "wax strong in the presence of God" (Doctrine and Covenants 121:45). Gospel teachers in our day come to know the power of Alma 36 as they preach the doctrine of repentance and invite the

Spirit to bear witness of these truths, whether it be in an individual interview or in a classroom.

Perhaps Helaman taught his father's experience to the two thousand stripling warriors as he prepared them for battle. True and complete repentance is what gave the stripling warriors confidence to fight a seasoned Lamanite army because they knew they were worthy to receive the Lord's miraculous blessings—"they do put their trust in God continually" (Alma 57:27). Their confidence and faith resulted in a great blessing whereby not one of them perished, although all had received wounds (57:25).

So what are the principles of repentance that Helaman taught his youthful stripling warriors to prepare them for battle? What are the doctrinal principles that will inspire today's youth and young adults to become worthy and continue to feel worthy as they serve missions and prepare to raise their own families?

### **Principles of Repentance**

In Alma 36, Alma begins his instruction to Helaman with an eternal formula for happiness: "For I do *know* that whosoever shall put their trust in God shall be supported in their trials, and their troubles, and their afflictions, and shall be lifted up at the last day" (Alma 36:3; emphasis added). Alma shares with Helaman his personal experience, divinely ratified through a witness of the Holy Ghost. There is no doubt in Alma's mind it is from God. He knows!

In his instruction to Helaman, Alma emphasizes the following principles that enabled him to repent completely and receive forgiveness from God. These principles include

- Recognize sin
- Take responsibility for our actions
- Receive the gift of godly sorrow
- Show faith in Jesus Christ and his Atonement
- Witness God's forgiveness
- Rejoice in forgiveness
- Receive physical strength and change of countenance
- Serve God without ceasing

### *Recognize Sin*

As Alma recounts his experience, he relates how an angel appeared unto him and said, “If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God” (Alma 36:9). Alma realized he was committing a great sin. He knew that he would be destroyed unless he stopped his awful ways, a clear understanding that pierced him to the very soul—“I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed, that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more” (36:11).

The first step in repentance is to recognize our sins and any weaknesses that are stumbling blocks to our progression. President Stephen L. Richards taught that repentance is an “ever-recurring acknowledgement of weakness and error and [a] seeking and living for the higher and better.”<sup>2</sup> Very few of us will have heavenly angels appear to us, but there are angels all around us. Our parents, family members, true friends, teachers, and priesthood leaders are aware of our challenges. They pray for us as we occasionally stumble through life. Why did the angel appear to Alma? “The Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father” (Mosiah 27:14).

Now is the time to repent. President M. Russell Ballard quotes his grandfather, Elder Melvin J. Ballard, who taught the danger of procrastinating the day of our repentance: “It is my judgment that any man or woman can do more to conform to the laws of God in one year in this life than they could in ten years when they are dead. . . . When clay is pliable it is much easier to change than when it gets hard and sets. . . . This life is the time to repent. That is why I presume it will take a thousand years . . . to do what it would have taken but three score years and ten to accomplish in this life.”<sup>3</sup>

Recognizing our sins and aligning our desires to God’s desires are daily exercises that bring the Spirit into our lives.

### *Take Responsibility for Our Actions*

In the next part of Alma’s counsel, he demonstrates that he took full responsibility for his efforts to destroy the Church: “Yea, I did remember all *my sins and iniquities*, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that *I had rebelled against my God*, and that *I had not kept his holy commandments*. Yea, and *I had murdered many of his children*, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine *so great had been my iniquities*, that the very

thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror” (Alma 36:13–14; emphasis added).

President Spencer W. Kimball wrote, “As with any . . . sin, forgiveness and recovery are dependent upon the offender’s repentance, which begins with recognition of the sin and acceptance of personal responsibility for it.”<sup>4</sup>

Elder Theodore M. Burton taught, “Forget all excuses and finally recognize fully, exactly, what you have done.”<sup>5</sup>

Alma clearly accepted full responsibility for his actions to destroy the Church and lead many of God’s children to spiritual destruction. There is a powerful, cleansing feeling that comes to a person when confessing sins before God and others without offering any excuses.

There is spiritual power in confessing all sins to God and serious sins to authorized priesthood leaders who are judges in Israel. Sincere and complete confession to God and to a judge in Israel is an outward action that indicates a person takes full responsibility for his or her sins.

The Church teaches that “serious transgressions . . . [need to be confessed] to both the Lord and His representatives in the Church. . . . Be completely honest with them. If you partially confess, mentioning only lesser mistakes, you will not be able to resolve a more serious, undisclosed transgression.”<sup>6</sup>

To Alma the Elder, the Lord revealed, “If he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also” (Mosiah 26:29).

When we recognize our sins and take full responsibility for them, without offering any excuses, it is our natural desire to confess them to God and to a judge in Israel. Repentant persons will find that a terrible load of guilt is removed and replaced with courage as they continue their journey through other principles of repentance.

### *Receive the Gift of Godly Sorrow*

As Alma pondered and took responsibility for his sins, he began to realize the awful consequences of his actions and their effects on innocent members of the Church he was trying to destroy. As noted, Alma realized he “had murdered many of [God’s] children, or rather led them away unto destruction” (Alma 36:14). In his rebellion against God, Alma had endangered more than just his own salvation; he had seriously harmed the testimonies and lives of others. His use of the word “murdered” dramatically characterizes his negative influence on others. Some of his followers had left the Church,

had turned to evil ways, and would never return to their covenants with God. Therefore, we can see that serious sins are not performed in a bubble; they always affect others—parents, siblings, friends, and youth in the sinner’s sphere of influence. Serious sins may harm innocent people who *would have been* converted if the sinner had been living the commandments. From his personal experience, Alma understood this principle when he preached to his son Corianton: “Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words” (Alma 39:11).

Those who transgress the laws of God often do not realize the many tentacles of influence that reach out from their sinful state. Only after transgressors ponder their sins do they begin to realize the number of people who are harmed by their bad habits. Like Alma, the repentant transgressor then develops sincere sorrow for his or her actions and seeks the peaceful resolution only a loving Father can give. This “godly sorrow” is a gift from God and is required for complete repentance.

In a modern example of the importance of godly sorrow, a young missionary met with his mission president and confessed sins that occurred before his mission. These sins were not confessed to his bishop and stake president. After discussing the situation with the Missionary Department, the mission president received permission to help the missionary repent while he continued to serve in the field. However, the missionary did not have a temple recommend for a season.

The missionary met with his president weekly and discussed President Kimball’s teachings in *The Miracle of Forgiveness*. After several meetings, his progress was good, but he was not manifesting the gift of godly sorrow. It was clear that the missionary thought his mistakes affected no one but himself.

In a few weeks, his companion would be going home. The companion had plans to attend the temple one last time before finishing his mission. Anticipating these plans, the president asked the first missionary how his companion could attend the temple if both of them did not have a current recommend since missionaries always stay with their companions. The missionary responded that he would stay in the waiting room of the temple while his companion attended a session with other missionaries.

The president was prompted not to approve this exception to the *Missionary Handbook*. The missionary quickly said, “But that means he won’t be able to attend the temple one last time before going home! That’s not



fair to him.” Although the president could see how this was not fair to the companion, he stood his ground. The president offered to be the one who would share this decision with the companion. The companion was surprised and disappointed. Then, with tears filling his eyes, he said, “I understand, President. I support your decision. I won’t go to the temple.” Now the president was the one who had tears rolling down his cheeks as he realized the majesty of this senior companion.

These two missionaries did not come to the temple grounds on their last preparation day together. The companion missed the final temple session, and both missionaries missed the pictures traditionally taken with other departing missionaries on that day.

In their next interview, the president noticed a change in the young missionary. He was more willing to accept counsel. He listened closely to the scriptures read in the interview. He prayed with more sincerity. This repentant missionary received the gift of godly sorrow and was ready to seek forgiveness from the Lord. The president realized how difficult it was to ask this of the departing companion, but he knew it was the Lord’s will so that a missionary could experience proper and complete repentance.<sup>7</sup>

President Benson taught this beautiful principle: “Godly sorrow is a gift of the Spirit. It is a deep realization that our actions have offended our Father and our God. It is the sharp and keen awareness that our behavior caused the Savior, He who knew no sin, even the greatest of all, to endure agony and suffering. Our sins caused Him to bleed at every pore. This very real mental and spiritual anguish is what the scriptures refer to as having ‘a broken heart and contrite spirit’ (D&C 20:37). Such a spirit is the absolute prerequisite for true repentance.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Show Faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement*

For three days and nights Alma was racked “with the pains of a damned soul”; his wish was to be banished and become extinct, never to return to God’s presence and be judged of his deeds (Alma 36:15–16). He had come to the deep realization that his sins had offended God.

During his painful ordeal, Alma remembered the teachings of his father about a Redeemer who would atone for our sins: “And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy

unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” (Alma 36:17).

His recollection of his father’s testimony demonstrates that even in his rebellious state, Alma the Younger had heard the teachings of his father about the Savior of the world. As a priest to wicked King Noah, his father had gone through his own rebellion against the truth. But his father had repented, been forgiven, and even progressed sufficiently to receive this promise from the Lord, “Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life” (Mosiah 26:20).

How could a young man like Alma not be touched by the words of his father as he was raised? Perhaps Alma could relate to the honest confession of his future missionary companion, Amulek, who declared, “I was called many times and I would not hear; therefore I knew concerning these things, yet I would not know” (Alma 10:6). It was now Alma’s moment to stand up and obey the Spirit that he felt or be destroyed as the angel had proclaimed. “Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death” (Alma 36:18). Alma knew his only source of final resolution was the Son of God, our Creator, the Savior of all worlds, even Jehovah. The plea was sincere and powerful, direct and clear, honest and complete.

Elder Richard G. Scott taught this principle, quoting Alma’s words to his son Shiblon:

“I was . . . in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul; and never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul. And now, my son, I have told you this that ye may learn wisdom, . . . that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ.” From this scripture, we can see that suffering does not bring forgiveness. It comes through faith in Christ and obedience to His teachings, so that His gift of redemption can apply.<sup>9</sup>

President Benson also testified:

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which sincere and meaningful repentance must be built. If we truly seek to put away sin, we must first look to Him who is the Author of our salvation. . . . For every Paul, for every Enos, [for every Alma the Younger,] and for every King Lamoni, there are hundreds and thousands of people who find the process of repentance much more subtle, much more imperceptible. Day by day they move closer to the Lord, little realizing they are building a godlike life. . . . We must not lose hope.<sup>10</sup>

### *Witness God's Forgiveness*

Alma had done all that he mortally could do to gain God's forgiveness. Time would prove his sincerity to forsake his sins and serve the Lord the remainder of his days. Through sincere repentance, Alma received the same sign as others in the Book of Mormon when they received forgiveness of their sins. It is the same sign we receive when we are forgiven of our sins: a witness of the Holy Ghost: "And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more" (Alma 36:19). Alma could remember his *pains* no more. The torment that racked Alma and "the pains of a damned soul" (36:16) that dominated his three-day experience were all swallowed up in the merciful Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Alma described these feelings to another worthy son, Shiblon: "I did find peace to my soul" (Alma 38:8). In latter-day language, President Kimball affirmed this same witness received by us today: "There comes a still, small, but penetrating voice whispering to [our] soul, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.'"<sup>11</sup> President Boyd K. Packer described it this way: "I have seen some who have spent a long winter of guilt and spiritual starvation emerge into the [brilliant] morning of forgiveness."<sup>12</sup> All these words and feelings describe the divine witness of the Holy Ghost as his powerful effects sanctify one's soul.

Could Alma remember his *sins*? Obviously, as we have been discussing in Alma 36. Alma remembered the nature and severity of his sins such that he could describe them to his son Helaman many years later. So why are many of us today, especially young adults and youth, confused about forgiveness because we can still remember our sins? Perhaps it's the promise declared by the Savior in modern days: "Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more" (Doctrine and Covenants 58:42).

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf clarified this beautiful principle: "God did not promise that *we* would not remember our sins. Remembering will help us avoid making the same mistakes again. But if we stay true and faithful, the memory of our sins will be softened over time."<sup>13</sup>

A missionary wrote to his mission president, "I've concluded that the reason why we are not having success in this area is because I'm not worthy to be here." When he read this statement, the president immediately called the missionary and set up an interview for that afternoon. He knew that a missionary

who did not feel worthy could not be effective teaching and testifying of the gospel.

When they met later that day, the president asked the missionary why he did not feel worthy. He responded, “I made some mistakes before my mission. I confessed them to my bishop and stake president. But the Lord obviously hasn’t forgiven me of these sins because I can still remember them.”

The president invited the missionary to read Doctrine and Covenants 58:42 and emphasized that the Lord remembers our sins no more but that *we* are blessed to remember our sins to avoid doing them again. The missionary understood and believed his president’s explanation, but he still did not feel worthy. He wanted to be sure; he wanted to know that he was worthy to be a missionary.

The missionary began reading *The Miracle of Forgiveness* and met with the president every week to discuss what he learned from President Kimball. In one of their weekly meetings, the missionary and his president felt the Spirit bear witness that he was worthy to serve a mission. The president clarified that they were feeling a witness of God’s forgiveness and that the president was a second witness of this event. The missionary returned to his area and finished his mission strong without further doubts about his worthiness.<sup>14</sup>

What a blessing it is to be able to remember our sins without the accompanying pains and guilt! By remembering them, we can avoid the circumstances that previously tempted us into making bad decisions. We can identify which friends bring an unrighteous influence into our lives so we can wisely associate with new friends. We can control our future obedience and truly forsake our sins by reflecting upon our past behavior.

The confusion of how we know for sure that we have been forgiven is real. Elder Scott explained why it is sometimes difficult to recognize the witness of forgiveness but how we may overcome any doubts after receiving this divine witness:

To continue to suffer for sins, when there has been proper repentance and forgiveness of the Lord, is not prompted by the Savior but by the master of deceit, whose goal has always been to bind and enslave the children of our Heavenly Father? . . . Jesus Christ paid the price and satisfied the demands of justice for all who are obedient to His teachings. Thus, full forgiveness is granted, and the distressing effects of sin need no longer persist in one’s life. Indeed, they *cannot persist* if one truly understands the meaning of Christ’s atonement. . . . When memory of prior mistakes encroaches upon your mind, turn your thoughts to Jesus Christ, to the miracle of forgiveness and renewal that comes through Him. Then your suffering will be replaced by joy, gratitude, and thanksgiving for His love.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding Alma's short repentance period, the question arises, How could Alma complete the repentance process for serious sins in merely three days? Forgiveness does not come after a standard waiting period, although minimum guidelines, such as six to twelve months, are occasionally suggested for serious sins. Elder Tad R. Callister taught, "Repentance is not measured by time but a change of heart."<sup>16</sup> The Lord knew that Alma's heart had changed; therefore, he forgave Alma of his sins three days after the angel appeared to him and the sons of Mosiah.

Elder David A. Bednar once taught new mission presidents, "We cannot help others learn to repent if we ourselves have not learned to repent properly and completely."<sup>17</sup> Missionaries first must be able to recognize forgiveness in their own lives and then teach the Lord's signs of forgiveness to others.

The pattern of Alma's repentance demonstrates that we should faithfully seek a witness of the Holy Ghost that we are forgiven of our sins. A loving Heavenly Father wants his children to know when we are clean from our mistakes. He will send his Spirit of peace to remove any guilt and pain associated with sins. In this way, we are not only able to *be* worthy but also to *feel* worthy.

### *Rejoice in Forgiveness*

"And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! Yea, I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy" (Alma 36:20–21). The power of the Savior's infinite Atonement washed away Alma's sins, and he was clean again. No wonder Alma had great cause to rejoice!

Through his total repentance, Alma experienced a dramatic change in his confidence to be in God's presence. Before he turned to Jesus Christ for remission of his sins, Alma had described his desires to *avoid* God: "Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds" (Alma 36:15). Contrast that with his feelings after receiving forgiveness: "Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and *my soul did long to be there*" (36:22; emphasis added). Such are the feelings of a soul who has repented completely and been forgiven, a soul who not only *is* worthy but *feels* worthy.

This principle of repentance, when we rejoice as a result of feeling clean, offers a time to build on God's gift of forgiveness and continue building a solid foundation that leads to conversion—to become “a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19).

Alma describes his own journey to conversion: “Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me” (Alma 5:46).

### *Receive Physical Strength and Change in Countenance*

The intense process of repentance and the accompanying miracle of forgiveness are spiritual acts that affect the entire soul—the body and the spirit (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:15). Certainly, the suffering and pain of the spirit would visibly influence its mortal companion, the physical body. In like manner, the joy and cleansing of the spirit are noticeable through the forgiven sinner's change in countenance.

During his mortal ministry, the Savior emphasized the relationship of the body and the spirit when sins are committed and forgiveness is received. At the pool of Bethesda, he healed a man unable to walk for thirty-eight years. Later the Savior said unto him, “Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” (John 5:14). To the man sick of the palsy, Jesus said, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. . . . Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house” (Mark 2:5, 11).

Alma experienced a dramatic change in his mortal state when he was forgiven, as demonstrated through restored strength. For three days and nights, he could not open his mouth or use his limbs (see Alma 36:10). After turning to Jesus Christ with great faith in his Atonement and receiving the joy of forgiveness, his strength was restored: “But behold, my limbs did receive their strength again, and I stood upon my feet, and did manifest unto the people that I had been born of God” (Alma 36:23). His entire soul was restored to a strong and healthy state.

Another modern example illustrates this eternal principle. Many years ago, a young mother came to the bishop's office with a desire to repent. As she entered the office, the bishop noticed she had a young face with pretty features that were clouded by darkness. Her face was covered with shadows as

if the lights in the room were not bright enough. Her eyes were dark, and it was difficult to see what color they were.

The bishop spent the next hour learning about her past. She was not married and had a little girl. When her ex-husband abandoned them a year before, she had, in her words, “gone off the deep end.” The bishop invited her to give specific details of her behavior. The young mother shared everything. She expressed doubts that she could ever be forgiven for what she had done. Even the bishop had thoughts about whether she could be forgiven, but that only revealed the mind of a priesthood leader who did not understand the scriptures.

Under the direction of the stake president, the bishop offered appropriate discipline and restricted her membership privileges. She was very faithful throughout the repentance process and was obedient to every instruction. After several months, both the bishop and the young mother received a witness that Heavenly Father had forgiven her of these serious sins. More months passed and she desired to be sealed to a worthy returned missionary.

The bishop attended the sealing ordinance in the Salt Lake Temple. The young mother’s face was angelic. In contrast to the darkness and shadows during their first meeting, her countenance shined with the brilliance of a worthy daughter of God. She was divinely beautiful in her temple clothing. This young mother had experienced the fruit of the tree of life, even God’s love. The Savior’s atonement was real. Both her spirit and body were dramatically affected through the miracle of forgiveness. As the bishop greeted the newly sealed couple, he noticed for the first time that her eyes were brown and filled with light.<sup>18</sup>

Alma taught this principle when he asked the people of Zarahemla, “Have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?” (Alma 5:14).

### *Serve God without Ceasing*

“By this ye shall know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (Doctrine and Covenants 58:43). Alma truly had received a witness that his sins were forgiven. The “joy and . . . marvelous light” he experienced left no doubt that his sins were washed away. The Lord would remember them no more. Was this experience merely temporary

and short-lived, or had there been a mighty change in his heart such that he would “have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2)?

Some twenty years after the angel appeared, Alma stated, “Yea, and from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance; that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Alma 36:24). The true evidence of forsaking one’s sins is not only leaving behind the old life of rebellion and corruption, but also building a new life of righteous service to God and his children.

No matter our calling in the Church or our stage in life, we can show our sincere desires to forsake our sins through a life of righteous service to God and our fellow men, one by one. Alma testified of the joy that comes from saving souls: “Yea, and now behold, O my son, the Lord doth give me exceedingly great joy in the fruit of my labors; for because of the word which he has imparted unto me, behold, many have been born of God, and have tasted as I have tasted, and have seen eye to eye as I have seen; therefore they do know of these things of which I have spoken, as I do know; and the knowledge which I have is of God” (Alma 36:25–26).

This is the true joy of righteous service after repentance and forgiveness of sins. Just as the negative example of a chronic sinner can affect others beyond the sinner, the powerful influence of a converted servant is beyond measure.

## **Conclusion**

The principles of repentance taught in Alma 36 define a simple pattern that Alma followed to receive forgiveness of his sins. Such a pattern is similar to what Helaman may have shared with the stripling warriors as they prepared for battle against the seasoned Lamanite army. Such a pattern is similar to what parents and leaders teach to prospective missionaries in the latter days as these young men and women carry the gospel message to a wicked and complex world. In each case, proper and complete repentance is made possible through faith in Jesus Christ and his Atonement.

The most important message we can share with many young people is true hope in forgiveness through the Atonement of Jesus Christ as they change their lives and abandon their sins. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland reassured us that there is always hope no matter where we are in our journey in life: “It is not



possible for you to sink lower than the infinite light of Christ's Atonement shines."<sup>19</sup>

President Russell M. Nelson taught, "The gospel of Jesus Christ is filled with His power, which is available to every earnestly seeking daughter or son of God. It is my testimony that when we draw His power into our lives, both He and we will rejoice."<sup>20</sup>

The message of Alma 36 continues to be repeated throughout the dispensations of time. Alma and Mormon were inspired to preserve these teachings for our day. Today's rising generation will respond to true doctrine as they understand simple principles of repentance and feel the power of forgiveness in their lives. **RE**

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## Notes

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2. Stephen L. Richards, in Conference Report, April 1956, 91.
3. M. Russell Ballard, "Begin Now to Keep the Commandments," in *Repentance* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 195–96.
4. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 84.
5. Theodore M. Burton, "The Meaning of Repentance," in *Repentance*, 31.
6. *True to the Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), 134.
7. Personal experience of the author.
8. Ezra Taft Benson, *Sermons and Writings of President Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 257.
9. Richard G. Scott, "We Love You—Please Come Back," in *Repentance*, 105–6.
10. Ezra Taft Benson, "A Mighty Change of Heart," in *Repentance*, 3, 6–7.
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12. Boyd K. Packer, "The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness," *Ensign*, November 1995, 18.
13. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "Point of Safe Return," *Ensign*, May 2007, 101.
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16. Tad R. Callister, "The Power of Principles," *Religious Educator* 19, no. 2 (2018): 7.
17. "Lord's Servants, Becoming a 'Preach My Gospel Missionary,'" *Church News*, 9 July 2011, 5.
18. Personal experience of the author.
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20. Russell M. Nelson, "Drawing the Power of Jesus Christ into Our Lives," *Ensign*, May 2017, 42.

## Appendix

### *Chiasmus in Alma 36*

My son give ear to my *words* (v. 1)  
*Keep the commandments* and ye shall *prosper in the land* (v. 1)  
 Do *as I* have done (v. 2)  
*Remember the captivity* of our fathers (v. 2)  
 They were in *bondage* (v. 2)  
 He surely did *deliver* them (v. 2)  
*Trust* in God (v. 3)  
 Supported in *trials, troubles, and afflictions* (v. 3)  
 Lifted up at the *last day* (v. 3)  
*I know* this not of myself but *of God* (v. 4)  
*Born of God* (v. 5)  
 I sought to destroy the church (vv. 6–9)  
 My *limbs* were paralyzed (v. 10)  
 Fear of being in the *presence of God* (vv. 14–15)  
*Pains* of a damned soul (v. 16)  
*Harrowed up by the memory of sins* (v. 17)  
**I remembered *Jesus Christ, a son of God*** (v. 17)  
**I cried, *Jesus Christ, son of God*** (v. 18)  
*Harrowed by the memory of sins no more* (v. 19)  
 Joy as exceeding as was the *pain* (v. 20)  
 Long to be in the *presence of God* (v. 22)  
 My *limbs* received strength again (v. 23)  
 I labored to bring souls to repentance (v. 24)  
*Born of God* (v. 26)  
 Therefore *my knowledge* is *of God* (v. 26)  
 Supported under *trials, troubles, and afflictions* (v. 26)  
*Trust* in him (v. 27)  
 He will *deliver* me (v. 27)  
 And *raise me up at the last day* (v. 28)  
 As God brought our fathers out of *bondage* and captivity (vv. 28–29)  
 Retain a *remembrance of their captivity* (v. 29)  
 Know *as I* do know (v. 30)  
*Keep the commandments* and ye shall *prosper in the land* (v. 30)  
 This according to his *word* (v. 30)<sup>21</sup>

Source: John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), chart 132.