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Leadership Lessons from the Book of Mormon: Nephi as a Case Study

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Leaders and scholars in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have, at various times, attempted to identify what constitutes leadership traits.¹ There are no universal leadership traits that predict a leader’s effectiveness in all situations. Elder Neal A. Maxwell, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, made the following comment: “While most of us can recognize good leadership when we experience or observe it, it is hard for us to isolate controlling traits in a clear-cut way.”² Each situation requires specific traits relating to the task at hand. These traits will develop uniquely to individuals and in the contexts in which they function.³ By faithfully practicing correct principles and petitioning the Lord for the associated spiritual gifts, one can learn and improve as a leader.⁴

We can see effective leadership in the restored Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world—from the work of the prophet and his associates in Salt Lake City to the work of a subsistence farmer who leads a developing branch in the Kilungu Hills of Kenya. Like modern Church leaders, Nephi, the son of Lehi, invited others to “come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto

him and be saved” (1 Nephi 15:14). The purpose of this paper is to investigate traits that made Nephi an effective leader.

Nephi mastered the art of effective leadership from many sources. He was taught by his mortal father, was tutored by the Godhead, and learned from his own experience, especially as a student of the scriptures. His actions confirm the following truth about leadership traits: “While it is true that some ‘leadership traits’ come as a gift or [as] inherited attributes, it is also true that effective leadership can be learned.”⁵

Noel B. Reynolds summarized well Nephi’s life as a leader when he wrote, “Nephi was an influential prophet and the founder of the Nephite people. He was apparently well-educated, faithful and obedient to God, courageous, and bold.”⁶ Rodney Turner wrote of Nephi, “He was about seventy years old when he passed away. He left behind a treasure of truth written upon plates of gold that neither time nor circumstance can tarnish, a treasure which will enrich the lives of countless millions in the dispensation of the fulness of times.”⁷

Why have I chosen to focus on Nephi in this article and not on one of the many other significant Book of Mormon figures such as Jacob, Moroni, or Mormon? Nephi is a foundational figure in the history of the Book of Mormon. Most pages in the Book of Mormon speak of the people of Nephi, who were named after him. The name “Nephite” follows them throughout their thousand-year history (see Helaman 5:6). Following Nephi’s death, those who became kings and leaders of the Nephites were named after him (see Jacob 1:11). Nephi led his people to the promised land, thereby creating a new society. By the time Nephi died, he had “established his people on sound political, legal, economic, and religious bases.”⁸ Thus, Nephi seems like the quintessential model of good leadership in the Book of Mormon.

While we acknowledge the existence of many leadership traits, this paper will focus on Nephi’s actions, charges, feelings, thoughts, teachings, and prophecies. In 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, and Jacob, we learn about Nephi’s teachings and extraordinary deeds. The following are some of Nephi’s leadership traits—traits that motivated change in others and made him one of the greatest leaders of his time: vision, obedience, ability to deal positively with challenges, initiative, ability to teach, and care for others.

Vision

Elder Spencer J. Condie, an emeritus member of the Seventy, said that “*a leader must have a vision of the work that lies ahead.*”⁹ This is sometimes

referred to as a “divine commission.” A divine commission defines one’s mission. For the divine commission to be achieved, leaders need to articulate it clearly to potential followers, thereby informing them of their role in achieving it.

Nephi boldly stated, “I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20). As early as 1 Nephi 2:19–22 and a little later in 1 Nephi 17:13, the Lord set out what would be Nephi’s role among his people. He was to lead his people to a land of promise prepared by the Lord. It was a land that was choice above all other lands. He was the first among the Nephite prophets to be given a divine commission: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper” (1 Nephi 2:20). That charge was followed by this promise: “thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren” (1 Nephi 2:22). Everything Nephi did between then and his death some fifty-five years later appears to have been motivated by his divine commission. Keeping God’s commandments became prerequisite to all he would accomplish.

Nephi confirmed his understanding of the divine commission to his father, saying, “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7). Nephi’s understanding and internalization of this divine commission separated him from his older brothers. With Nephi’s commitment to obedience, coupled with God’s help, all things became possible for this great prophet.

The first task given to all the sons of Lehi was to get the plates of brass from Laban. Nephi’s two oldest brothers murmured. In their complaints, they said, “How is it possible that the Lord will deliver Laban into our hands?” (1 Nephi 3:31). Motivated by the divine commission, Nephi responded, “Let us go up again unto Jerusalem, and let us be faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord; for behold he is mightier than all the earth, then why not mightier than Laban and his fifty, yea, or even than his tens of thousands?” (1 Nephi 4:1). When he obtained the records, he reflected on his divine commission and knew it was his obedience that enabled him to succeed where others had failed (see 1 Nephi 4:14). Later, Nephi successfully convinced Zoram to come with him into the wilderness by articulating this same divine commission to him (see 1 Nephi 4:34).

Challenges regularly confront leaders, and in such times an understanding of a divine commission becomes important. Without vision, a leader will crumble and fall. Nephi's leadership and strategies came under a barrage of challenges. He was asked to build a ship. He also needed to find tools and materials to build that ship. His brothers and other family members opposed him. His understanding of his divine commission motivated him to keep going despite the extreme challenges. The Lord reminded him of his divine commission: "And I will also be your light in the wilderness; and I will prepare the way before you, if it so be that ye shall keep my commandments; wherefore, inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall be led towards the promised land; and ye shall know that it is by me that ye are led" (1 Nephi 17:13).

Nephi's mentor and father, Lehi, understood this divine commission. As soon as they were in the promised land, he called his family together, and among the first things he told them was the divine commission (see 2 Nephi 1:9). Sensing disunity in the family, which stemmed from some not accepting Nephi as their leader, Lehi confirmed that Nephi was their head. He drew their attention to how Nephi faithfully observed the divine commission (see 2 Nephi 1:24). Lehi recognized Nephi's ability as a leader. Just before his death, the patriarch rehearsed to his family Nephi's innate and developed leadership traits (see 2 Nephi 1:25–28).

After Nephi had been separated from his disobedient and rebellious brothers, his followers asked him to be their king (see 2 Nephi 5:18). At that point, Nephi was firmly established and recognized as a leader of note among his people. He also recognized this of himself, writing, "Behold, the words of the Lord had been fulfilled unto my brethren, which he spake concerning them, that I should be their ruler and their teacher . . . according to the commandments of the Lord, until the time they sought to take away my life" (2 Nephi 5:19). Nephi stressed the importance of the divine commission by admonishing his people "to keep the judgments, and the statutes, and the commandments of the Lord in all things, according to the law of Moses" (2 Nephi 5:10).

Despite having lost some members of his family, Nephi succeeded in communicating his divine commission to those who remained. Those that followed the divine commission prospered, but those that rejected it were seldom blessed. Later, his own people, the Nephites, disappeared from the earth because they rebelled and rejected the divine commission.

Obedience

From his youth, Nephi listened to and obeyed instructions received from the Lord and from his father. His willingness to obey without murmuring distinguished him from his brothers. The propensity to obey helped him to accomplish great things. Nephi was born with an obedient disposition. We know that Lehi was consistently obedient to the Lord, and he most certainly would have raised all his children with the same values. Nephi learned his first lesson on obedience from his father. Lehi received a commandment in a dream to take his family and depart into the wilderness (see 1 Nephi 2:2–3). He was to leave behind a well-established, comfortable life. Lehi left behind “gold and silver and all manner of riches” (see 1 Nephi 3:16). Nephi’s account tells us how Lehi responded to this command, “And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord, wherefore he did as the Lord commanded.” This example from his father anchored Nephi’s life of obedience.

Nephi did not obey blindly, meaning he didn’t just obey anything he was told without asking questions. He also did not obey because he feared man, or because he was influenced by his peers. He obeyed for two reasons: first, he had a cherished relationship with God, and second, he wanted to please his father. “Our desire to be obedient grows as our love for God increases.”¹⁰ By contrast, Lemuel was a conformist in the sense that he did all that his older brother, Laman, did. Indeed, Rodney Turner refers to Lemuel as Laman’s “tag-along brother.”¹¹

The principle of faith is discussed in the book of Hebrews. We learn that “by faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Hebrews 11:8). Nephi seemed to have possessed the same obedient spirit as Abraham did. He led his brothers back to Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 4:1–5). When he was alone, he crept into the city and went forth toward the house of Laban. He informs us, “I was led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which I should do” (1 Nephi 4:6). Throughout this episode, he did not know what was waiting for him. At last, he found himself having to smite off Laban’s head, something that was totally against the teachings he had received from his father and his faith.

While serving as Church Commissioner of Education, Jeffrey R. Holland offered this explanation of the episode: “Obedience to divine revelation, not death, is the focal point of this story. God can restore life in time and in eternity; he can do almost nothing with wilful disobedience. The quality of our

obedience to God's commandments is still the clearest expression of the quality of our faith in him."¹² Dr. Richard J. Krejcir, a researcher from the Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership, adds, "The result [of obedience] is that we become more mature, become of more use to His glory."¹³ As Nephi matured in his relationship with God, and in his understanding of his mission, obedience became more natural to him. It became a trait for which he was known. With no one instructing him how to make the plates, he undertook the task. He gave them the name of Nephi, and he offered this explanatory comment: "Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me to make these plates for a wise purpose in him, which purpose I know not" (1 Nephi 9:5).

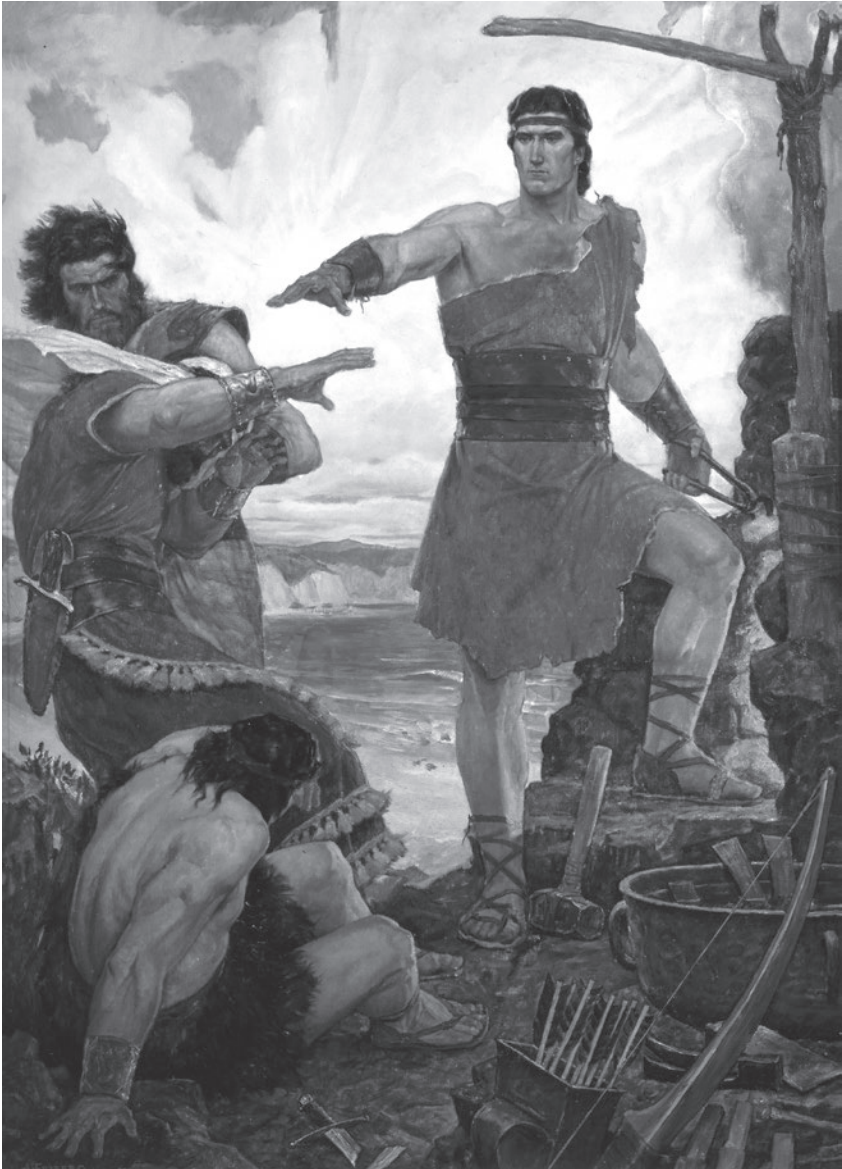
This trait of obeying without knowing all the details is constantly displayed in the life of Nephi. The big task awaiting the young prophet would be building a ship. This project was an act of faith on Nephi's part because he had never built anything like a ship before (see 1 Nephi 17:8, 19). He took on this huge task because he was motivated by the help he had always received from the Lord. The Lord depended on him to accomplish His purpose for His people because He recognized Nephi's obedient nature and spirit.

Ability to Deal Positively with Challenges

Leaders are constantly under the watchful eyes of both critics and admirers. When challenges come, they serve as a test of leaders' character. How they respond differentiates leaders from followers and failures. True leaders know that the road to success is not always paved with gold; it can be very rocky. Challenges come in three forms: first, external, associated with people and situations. Second, internal, stemming from the inadequacies of leaders themselves. When challenges occur, they expose leaders' strengths or limitations. Third, some challenges come from the nature of the leadership role.

Like other leaders described above, Nephi faced all three kinds of challenges. Lehi asked his sons to return to Jerusalem to invite Ishmael to join them in the wilderness. On their way back from Jerusalem, Laman and Lemuel, joined by some of Ishmael's children, rebelled and wanted to return to the land of their inheritance (see 1 Nephi 7). They were now comparing living conditions between the barren desert of the wilderness and the sophisticated life in the city of Jerusalem. Their behavior grieved Nephi. During this grieving moment, Nephi gave a strong lecture, reminding them of the good things the Lord had done for them. He repeatedly used the phrase "How is it . . . ?" (see 1 Nephi 7:8–12). This rebuke by Nephi did not convince them

to stop. They bound him with cords and sought to take away his life. For the first time, Nephi faced potential death at the hands of his own brothers. We now know how Nephi, as a leader, responded to the first major challenge. He taught and prayed (see 1 Nephi 7:8–14, 17). In Doctrine and Covenants 10:5 the Lord promises us that, when we pray always, we will conquer. In response



Arnold Friberg, *Nephi Rebuking His Rebellious Brothers*.

to Nephi's prayer, the cords were miraculously loosened. Nephi continued teaching his brethren (see 1 Nephi 7:18).

While Lehi's family was in the wilderness, the bows lost their spring, resulting in difficulties obtaining food. Laman and Lemuel complained. Instead of returning anger for anger, Nephi tried to reason with his brothers. As a leader, he knew he had to maintain peace. He went a step further. Instead of complaining, Nephi took initiative and became creative. When a leader meets a crisis, he or she finds innovative ways of resolving the challenge. Instead of joining his brothers in murmuring, Nephi responded proactively: "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did make out of wood a bow, and out of a straight stick, an arrow; wherefore, I did arm myself with a bow and an arrow, with a sling and with stones" (1 Nephi 16:23). After taking this initiative, he consulted with his father, the leader and a prophet. These actions in trying to resolve a crisis produced positive results. Nephi returned from hunting, carrying meat for his family.

In times of crisis, a leader remains constant. Nephi put his trust in God. Despite this, Nephi's life was often in danger. After the death of Ishmael, Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael wanted to kill both Lehi and Nephi (see 1 Nephi 16:37). Daily they brought more charges against Nephi. They were now accusing him of being a liar for claiming "that the Lord [had] talked with him, and also that angels [had] ministered unto him" (1 Nephi 16:38). An additional charge was brought against Nephi—that of making himself a king and a ruler over them. Nephi concludes his record by saying that the Lord was with them. At that moment, he survived the anger and hatred from his brothers. Nephi trusted his mortal father and his Heavenly Father. He knew their love for him, especially the love of his Heavenly Father. It was this love that would rescue him.

In 1 Nephi 17, Nephi was commanded to build a ship. His brothers rebuked him and laughed at him and said he couldn't build a ship because he was lacking in judgment. When faced with challenges, great leaders reflect on where they have come from. Nephi responded by reminding them of how the Lord helped Moses cross the Red Sea (see 1 Nephi 17:26–51). Understanding history brings back memories that can rekindle the spirit of greatness. This long lecture from Nephi temporarily improved the situation: "I, Nephi, said many things unto my brethren, insomuch that they were confounded and could not contend against me; neither durst they lay their hands upon me nor touch me with their fingers, even for the space of many days. Now they

durst not do this lest they should wither before me, so powerful was the Spirit of God; and thus it had wrought upon them” (1 Nephi 17:52). Nephi could not prevail over his brothers alone, but through the Lord’s help, he succeeded. They fell before him and were about to worship him (1 Nephi 17:55).

Once the ship was finished, they entered it, hopeful that they would arrive in the promised land peacefully, but it wasn’t to be so. While enjoying their journey, some began to dance and sing and to speak with much rudeness. To a spiritually sensitive Nephi, this did not sit well. Their rudeness seemed offensive to God. Nephi responded, “They did forget by what power they had been brought thither” (1 Nephi 18:9). As a leader, he immediately addressed this concern. They were angry with him. They took him and bound him with cords and threatened him, even with death. Nephi prayed. Soon they could not steer the ship, and a great storm and terrible tempest arose, and no progress was made on their journey. They began to repent and then loosened the cords so Nephi took over the steering of the ship. Again, we see that Nephi responded to all the challenges he faced with consistency. He called upon God for intervention.

Once they had arrived in the promised land, Laman and Lemuel continued with their complaining (see 2 Nephi 5:3). Indeed, their complaining and murmuring were accompanied by death threats. With Lehi gone, Nephi was on his own to defend himself against his oldest brothers. The Lord never left him. This time the Lord did more than burst the cords; He gave a final solution, counseling Nephi that he and his people “should depart from them and flee into the wilderness” (2 Nephi 5:5). As painful as this separation was, it needed to be done. As leaders continue to face one challenge after another, they cannot continue to respond to them with the same strategy. A new creative and innovative response is required. Very early in his life, Nephi had seen his father fleeing from their ancestral home in Jerusalem, and now Nephi took his family with him as he separated himself from his brothers. The record does not state how he felt when he received this instruction. Previously, the record tells us that despite his brothers’ shortcomings, which included them wanting to take away his life, Nephi loved them. We can assume that it was a difficult direction from the Lord to have him separate from people he loved, but Nephi obeyed.

Initiative

The necessity of following direction is taught to most people from their infancy. Through this process great things are accomplished. However, for one to become an effective leader and accomplish greater things, one would need to complement taking instructions with taking initiative. When leaders take initiative, they demonstrate maturity and mental stability. Such leaders can make meaningful contributions to their organizations and institutions. Initiative is a sibling to proactivity. Leaders possessing this trait don't wait for someone else to tell them what to do. They take the initiative to identify and solve problems.¹⁴ Nephi demonstrated this leadership trait, starting with making the plates of Nephi (see 1 Nephi 9:2; 19:2).

President James E. Faust, a former member of the First Presidency, stressed that leaders “cause things to happen.”¹⁵ In other words, leaders get things done! To successfully cause things to happen, leaders should be multidimensional. They should bring both natural and acquired skills to their positions. They look for ways to develop leadership skills. Furthermore, they surround themselves with those who possess skills and knowledge. They do all these things because they understand the need to cause things to happen—to get things done. Nephi was a son to Lehi, a brother, a father, a husband, a prophet, a teacher, and a king to his people. Nephi was a writer and a recorder keeper. Nephi was a great public orator and poet (see 2 Nephi 4). He was a student of many disciplines, judged by the many things he accomplished.

As it stands, the sacred record does not tell us that Nephi received help from any of his peers in accomplishing the things he did. It is reasonable to conclude that he caused things to happen by gathering around him those who possessed different skills—skills that he may not have possessed himself. Nephi was a well-recognized colonizer. Working together, under the direction of Nephi, the people built a great civilization. He was a hunter. He planted vegetables and fruit trees. He taught his people how to plow the fields. We saw him assist his father in conquering new lands, such as the barren wilderness and the more fertile lands, such as Bountiful. When he separated from his rebellious older brothers and their families, he acquired more land for his people.

The small colony's relative political, economic, and social stability came about because their newly installed king took initiative (see 2 Nephi 3:12). In the professional literature, these leaders are sometimes called “transformational leaders” because they focus primarily on initiating and managing change in those they serve. They invest energy in efforts that influence people

to improve, to stretch, and to redefine what is possible.¹⁶ Most of the initiatives Nephi undertook are summarized in 2 Nephi 5. He was a respected soldier and military commander. He wielded a sword in defence of his people on many occasions (see 2 Nephi 5; Jacob 1). He took the sword of Laban as a pattern and made many swords to defend his people. He took time to teach his people how to build buildings. Besides the building of a temple, many other buildings were constructed. He further taught them how to work with wood, iron, copper, brass, steel, gold, silver, and other precious metals. These initiatives by Nephi differentiated the two newly founded nations. Nephi taught his people “to be industrious, and to labor with their hands” (2 Nephi 5:17). His people “lived after the manner of happiness” (2 Nephi 5:27). According to the Nephite record, the Lamanites lacked similar initiatives, and “they did become an idle people, full of mischief and subtlety, and did seek in the wilderness for beasts of prey” (2 Nephi 5:24). Leadership differentiated these groups. The Nephites were led by a righteous leader, one who took initiative to teach and do things for his people, while the Lamanites were led by people who exhibited behaviors that were exactly the opposite.

Ability to Teach

Great leaders find satisfaction when engaged in the process of teaching others. Nephi is no different from the leaders described above. He spent over fifty years teaching his people. President Russell M. Nelson was called to the apostleship in 1984. Since that time he has continued to do so. Prophets and other leaders are called to teach. Through their teachings they can convey God’s will, warn, advise, and offer guidance concerning future events. In doing so, leaders model the Savior in their ministries. Certainly Nephi did not disappoint in demonstrating this trait as a leader of his people.

Many things qualified Nephi to be a teacher and a leader. For example, Noel B. Reynolds commented on how Nephi was taught by the Father and Son: “Nephi was actually team-taught the gospel by the Father and the Son. Nephi quotes each one of them three times! We do not have a comparable passage anywhere in scripture, and perhaps the only other recorded experience with the Father and the Son together that would be comparable would be Joseph Smith’s First Vision.”¹⁷ Nephi was also taught by angels (see 1 Nephi 8:5–7).

Nephi’s ability to teach can be seen when he instructs individuals, like his brother Sam (see 1 Nephi 2:17); small groups, like his two older brothers

(see 1 Nephi 3:15–18; 15; 16); and larger groups, such as his small colony, after being separated from his brothers (see 2 Nephi 5). As the group became larger, he continued to increase in wisdom and the ability to communicate effectively (see 2 Nephi 25–33). Nephi taught the people he lived with, but he also directed his teachings to the Jews, the Gentiles, and to future generations (see 2 Nephi 33:9–10). As he taught, he implemented various teaching methods. He used his life experiences and complemented them by quoting from the scriptures.

Like all great leaders, Nephi believed that self-development, through personal study, should be pursued. Lehi read through the plates, and Nephi testified of this (see 1 Nephi 5:21). He would later quote extensively from the ancient records (see 1 Nephi 5:10–22). Nephi's thirst for knowledge is evident in his desire to "see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost" (1 Nephi 10:17). The desire to know (see 1 Nephi 11:1, 3) differentiated Nephi from his two oldest brothers and qualified him to be a great teacher. Through his personal study of the scriptures, Nephi was able to introduce his readers to ancient prophets such as Zenock, Neum, and Zenos (see 1 Nephi 19:10; Alma 33:15–16). He was also taught by the Spirit (see 1 Nephi 4). The combined impact of different teachers in his life—together with his desire to know—prepared him well to develop the traits of a good teacher that are so important in leadership. A true teacher is one who possesses knowledge. That knowledge is passed by the master teacher to his students. Repeatedly, Nephi showed that he possessed this trait.

As his ability to teach increased, he got better in both the written and spoken word (see 2 Nephi 33:1). Toward the end of his record, we learn more about his philosophy of teaching. In 2 Nephi 33:4–6, we read the following:

And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them, for it persuadeth them to do good; it maketh known unto them of their fathers; and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal.

And it speaketh harshly against sin, according to the plainness of the truth; wherefore, no man will be angry at the words which I have written save he shall be of the spirit of the devil.

I glory in plainness; I glory in truth; I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell.

Toward the end of his mortal life, Nephi revealed what made him an effective teacher. He talked about using and relying on the Holy Ghost to teach: "After ye had received the Holy Ghost ye could speak with the tongue

of angels,” adding that the Holy Ghost inspires us with “the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:2–3). He also differentiated between speaking and writing. He acknowledged that he was not as good at writing as at speaking (see 2 Nephi 33:1). He explained why he preferred speaking to writing. Going back to what he said earlier about the Holy Ghost, he wrote, “For when a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men” (2 Nephi 33:1). In this verse, he speaks as a teacher. Despite having been foreordained as a prophet, early in his life he recognized the importance of developing teaching skills if he were to have an impact as a teacher and a leader.

Nephi’s Care for Others

Leaders influence those around them. Leaders have followers. Great leaders understand others, particularly those who are their “followers.”¹⁸ Leaders share their feelings and opinions. The analysis of these opinions tells us more about leaders.

The following are a few instances in which we learn more about who Nephi was as he interacted with different people. For example, he expressed his feelings for his people after he had seen a vision of their future destruction: “I, Nephi, was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts” (1 Nephi 15:4). The word *grieve* is a strong word that expresses great sorrow or distress. Others have said it implies deep mental suffering, often endured alone and in silence.¹⁹ A similar feeling is expressed in 2 Nephi 26, but a different word is given. He said, “O the pain, and the anguish of my soul for the loss of the slain of my people!” (2 Nephi 26:7). Nephi had feelings toward his people, and he wasn’t shy in expressing those feelings. In the verses above he shared his deep feelings of sadness.

As a leader, Nephi expressed hope that his brothers would stay faithful: “I had joy and great hopes of them” (1 Nephi 16:5). True leaders encourage hope, especially of those they lead. After Nephi had taught his brothers, he wrote, “They did humble themselves before the Lord; insomuch that I had joy and great hope of them, that they would walk in the paths of righteousness” (1 Nephi 16:10). Despite this, the brothers continued in the paths of unrighteousness.

Many tasks were given to Nephi, and he counted on many people to help, including his brothers. Yet his brothers were a disappointment to him. They complained and refuse to help, for they did not believe that he could build a

ship. In reaction to this response, Nephi “was exceedingly sorrowful because of the hardness of their hearts” (1 Nephi 17:19). The feeling of sorrow is a feeling of unhappiness because of the unexpected outcome.

As they sailed to the promised land, his brothers and their companions began to dance, to sing, and to speak with rudeness. Nephi observed that they had forgotten by what power they had been brought to where they were. In reaction to what he was observing, he “began to fear exceedingly lest the Lord should be angry with us” (1 Nephi 18:10). He feared not only for himself but for the entire company on board.

Nephi understood the importance of the words of Isaiah. Nephi had found joy and vital relevance in them, and he desired that his own people could find the same. In 2 Nephi 25:1 he expressed these words: “For behold, Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand.” Because of this fear, he advised all who would read Isaiah’s words that the words are plain to those who are filled with the spirit of prophecy (see 2 Nephi 25:4). Today, many of us skip the Isaiah chapters because of the work it takes to understand them. By skipping them, we miss the prophecies of the Jesus Christ, the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon—prophecies contained in the words of Isaiah. Nephi’s fears stem from his sense that many would not understand these important prophetic words.

Toward the end of his mortal ministry, Nephi continued to pour out the feelings he had for his people. “But I, Nephi, have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people. For I pray continually for them by day, and by mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them; and I cry unto my God in faith, and I know that he will hear my cry” (2 Nephi 33:3). These are the words of a leader that is not self-serving but who instead has a deep concern for those whom he leads. It appears from these words that the spiritual and physical well-being of his people was always on his mind. The views and feelings Nephi had about his people make him one of the greatest leaders of all time.

Conclusion

The truthfulness of the Book of Mormon is found not only in its doctrines and teachings but also in how its characters exemplify leadership skills. Anyone desiring to learn about leadership might profit by a study of the lives of the leaders found in its pages. Elder Maxwell put it well when he said, “Since the

Church has no corps of professionals, it must depend upon leaders developed from within the membership as a whole. . . . The Church's need is greater than ever now, both in terms of numbers and a requirement for greater devotion and skill. . . . So must the need for more capable and responsible leadership multiply."²⁰ **RE**

Notes

1. For examples, see Rodger Dean Duncan and Ed J. Pinegar, *Leadership for Saints: A Practical Guide for Christlike Service* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2002); Spencer J. Condie, "Some Scriptural Lessons on Leadership," *Ensign*, May 1990, 27–28; James E. Faust, "These I Will Make My Leaders," *Ensign*, October 1980, 34–37; Spencer W. Kimball, "Jesus the Perfect Leader," *Ensign*, August 1979, 5–7.
2. Neal A. Maxwell, "Looking at Leadership," in ". . . A More Excellent Way": *Essays on Leadership for Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), 16.
3. Sean M. Lennon, "Teacher Personality and Leadership: Exploring Potential Differences in Teaching Styles and Experiences," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 14 (June 2012): 38–45.
4. Duncan and Pinegar, *Leadership for Saints*, 1.
5. Duncan and Pinegar, *Leadership for Saints*, 2.
6. Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi 1," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1003.
7. Rodney Turner, "The Prophet Nephi," in *First Nephi: The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1988), 92.
8. Reynolds, "Nephi 1," 3:1003.
9. Spencer J. Condie, "Some Scriptural Lessons on Leadership," *Ensign*, April 1990, 27.
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