
THE LIVING REALITY OF THE SAVIOR'S MERCY

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Easter 2000 marked the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity. For Latter-day Saints, the Book of Mormon is our witness to the world that the Savior not only atoned for the sins of all mankind, rose from the tomb Easter morn, and opened the way for eternal life, but that He also loves us and ministers among us today. No other book of scripture better explains the Savior's atoning sacrifice and its personal meaning to us. It reveals His nature, unveils His character, and discloses His caring kindness. President Gordon B. Hinckley testified, "Brothers and sisters, without reservation I promise you that if you will prayerfully read the Book of Mormon, regardless of how many times you previously have read it, there will come into your hearts an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord. There will come a strengthened resolution to walk in obedience to his commandments,

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and there will come a stronger testimony of *the living reality* of the Son of God."¹

That "living reality" includes the reason Christ came to this earth—to atone for our sins and redeem us from the Fall (see D&C 76:40–41). He came that we might have life, but He also came that we might have it "more abundantly" (John 10:10). There are so many lessons we can learn from His life and sacrifice. Even in the process of dying for our sins, the Savior taught us how to live a more abundant life. For example, He taught, "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11) and showed us precisely that kind of humility when He washed His disciples' feet (see John 13:13–15). He showed us how sacred hymns, like prayer, can lift our souls and prepare us for the difficulties that lie ahead (see Matthew 26:30; D&C 25:12). He showed us how to handle trials without self-absorbing self-pity. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell observed, "He who suffered the most, had no self-pity!"² In fact, He served others in the midst of His own agony by healing an assailant's ear (see Luke 22:49–51), forgiving those who mercilessly crucified Him (see 23:33–34), extending consoling words to a thief on the cross (see 23:40–43), and asking John to care for His mother after He was gone (see John 19:26–27). His meekness and empathy for others while He was suffering such intense pain was one of the greatest lessons about charity—pure love—ever shown. The Savior also taught us to be kind to those who seek our destruction and to pray for those who spitefully use us. He followed His own teachings perfectly (see Matthew 5:44; Luke 23:33–34). He taught us about

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Power of the Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, June 1988, 6; emphasis added.

2. Neal A. Maxwell, "O How Great the Plan of Our God" (2 Nephi 9:13),* address to CES religious educators at Temple Square, Salt Lake City, 3 February 1995.

endurance and humble submission to the will of God (see 1 Nephi 19:9). He also taught us about enduring the ironies of mortality. At one point, He cried out on the cross, "I thirst," and those who heard Him offered Him vinegar to drink (see John 19:28-30). Imagine, the very God who created this planet for us and provides us with life-sustaining water—yet when He comes to this earth there is no room for Him (see Luke 2:7), and when He thirsts we offer Him vinegar to drink! He also taught us about humility in prayer. In the course of suffering the "fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God" (Doctrine and Covenants 76:107), He spoke to His Father in the most intimate and familiar of terms (see Mark 14:36; Matthew 27:46).

His perfect example is the rock we must build our lives upon. "Remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; . . . which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall" (Helaman 5:12). His life, His sacrifice, and the Father's plan of salvation are the cornerstones of our faith (see Ephesians 2:20).³ It is as important for us to understand the Savior's nature and character as it is to understand His teachings.⁴ No other book reveals Christ's divine nature and importance better than the Book of Mormon.

3. See also Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-86), 13:56.

4. President J. Reuben Clark Jr. said, "It is all right to speak of the Savior and the beauty of his doctrines, and the beauty of the truth. But . . . this is the thing I wish you . . . always carry with you, the Savior is to be looked at as the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world. His teachings were ancillary and auxiliary to that fact." David H. Yarn, ed., *Selected Papers of J. Reuben Clark Jr.* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1984), 187.

HIS MINISTRY TODAY

Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, is the centerpiece of the Father's plan for our salvation. He is the chief cornerstone of the Church in all dispensations, including these latter days. He is not some historical figure of the past but is the very God who declared, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen" (Revelation 1:18). He lives and is personally involved in helping us to obtain eternal life. His mission of bringing to pass "the immortality and eternal life" (Moses 1:39) of all mankind did not end with His death and resurrection. His mission will not be completed until every one of the Father's children has been given every possible opportunity to receive all the blessings flowing from His atoning sacrifice.

His work of atoning for our sins and making possible the resurrection of all mankind has been done. The door leading to eternal life has been forever unlocked (see Revelation 3:8). His merciful ministry now is to help those who desire to return to the Father's presence, as the Book of Mormon testifies: "Thus we may see that the Lord is merciful *unto all who will*, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name. Yea . . . *the gate of heaven is open unto all*, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. Yea . . . *whosoever will* may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man [or woman] of Christ in a strait and narrow course . . . and land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob and with all our holy fathers to go no more out" (Helaman 3:27-30; emphasis added).

HELP IN TIME OF NEED

The Savior began His mortal ministry by quoting from a prophecy of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives . . . to comfort all that mourn . . . to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:1-3; compare Luke 4:18-19).

All of us realize that in His atonement and resurrection, He did something for us we could not do for ourselves. But the spirit of Isaiah's prophecy is that Christ would do something more. Besides providing a way for us to escape the demands of justice, and beyond enabling the resurrection of all mankind, our Savior would also extend mercy to help us in time of need (see Mosiah 16:12). His mercy is the ultimate expression of His love for us. As Isaiah explained, He will teach us, comfort us, give us beauty, anoint us with the oil of joy, and clothe us with the garment of praise. Christ's atonement provides eternal life and is a real power that helps us throughout life. It is our immediate help as well as our eternal hope.

The indescribable suffering that caused the Savior to descend below all things was something He willingly submitted to "because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men" (1 Nephi 19:9). Being thus filled with mercy, He now extends that loving-kindness and long-suffering to us. As the Apostle Paul described, "Wherefore in all things it behoved him [our Savior] to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest. . . . For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, *he is able to succour them that are tempted*. . . . For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our

infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that *we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*" (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16; emphasis added).

Christ's mortal ministry enriched His empathy for mortals. "His sojourn in mortality and his atoning experience provide him with unique insights regarding our challenges, sorrows, and infirmities."⁵

The Savior has carried all our burdens. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Mosiah 14:5). He understands perfectly what our personal trials and individual infirmities are about. He knows what we need, and He gives to the Holy Ghost a knowledge of how best to help us (see John 16:12-14). The prophet Alma further described how the Savior's suffering affected His love for us: "And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith *he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people . . . and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities*" (Alma 7:11-12; emphasis added).

REMEMBER HIS MERCY

During his ministry, the prophet Isaiah reminded Israel of the Lord's compassion for them: "I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according

5. Merrill J. Bateman, "One by One," *Brigham Young Magazine* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, Spring 1998), 4.

to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses. For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:7-9).

The Lord reassured Israel with these words (which later became a refrain in the latter-day hymn "How Firm a Foundation"): "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

These were not promises to be fulfilled in the next life. They were given as a comforting blessing that God would help Israel now, during their daily trials and in the midst of their mortal exigencies.

In a similar manner, the prophets in the Book of Mormon taught that the merciful help of the Atonement is meant for this life as well as the next. "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).

In fact, one of the major purposes of the Book of Mormon, as stated by its authors, is to declare to all people how merciful the Savior is and how we are to ponder and apply His mercy in our lives. The prophet Zenock testified that the Father is displeased with those who do not appreciate Christ's mercy and grace: "Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand *thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son*" (Alma 33:16; emphasis added).

In the opening chapter of the Book of Mormon, Nephi declared the underlying purpose for writing his record: "Behold, 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; emphasis added). He also testified and illustrated with personal examples that with the help of the Lord we can do anything we are commanded to do (see 3:7).

In the closing chapter, written over a thousand years later, Moroni pled with us: "Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things . . . that ye would *remember how merciful the Lord hath been* unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts" (Moroni 10:3; emphasis added).

EXTENDED MERCY

We often attribute our blessings to good fortune, luck, or our own genius. But the Book of Mormon reminds us, page after page, of how involved the Savior and our Heavenly Father are in our lives. Its stories and teachings describe a loving, caring, nurturing, forgiving Savior.

Numerous words in the Book of Mormon describe the Savior's "tender mercies." Often these words refer to the Savior's redemption of mankind (the atonement and the resurrection). But in many instances, the words describing His mercy refer to the Savior's caring compassion to bless us, His brothers and sisters. We may not see Him, we might not even recognize His influence, but there are times when we do feel His nearness. His ministry now, as described in the Book of Mormon, is to get us through this vale of tears and sorrow. His mercy is extended to us throughout our lives and will also continue even beyond the grave, as these scriptures attest:

"Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and

the resurrection—behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, . . . that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow" (Alma 40:11–12).

And after the Resurrection, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

President Brigham Young wisely observed that one day, in the celestial kingdom, we will look back on the difficulties of our lives and say, "But what of all that? Those things were but for a moment, and we are now here."⁶

Like Joseph of Egypt, we will one day realize that God can take any suffering from us and turn it into a blessing. After a very difficult life, Joseph of Egypt declared that "God . . . hath made me forget all my toil; . . . caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction" (Genesis 41:51–52). The Prophet Joseph Smith learned the same truth after languishing in Liberty Jail: "If thou shouldst be cast into the pit, . . . [or] if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good" (D&C 122:7).

All pain and any affliction can be consecrated for our gain if anointed with the balm of Gilead which Jesus alone offers (see 2 Nephi 2:2). Understanding this leads us to unending gratitude for Christ and the Father, as Elder Neal A. Maxwell

6, *Brigham Young*, vol. 1 of *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* series (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 178.

explained: "The more we know of Jesus' atonement, the more we will humbly and gladly glorify Him, His atonement, and His character. We will never tire of paying tribute to His goodness and loving kindness. How long will we so speak of our gratitude for His atonement? The scriptures advise 'forever and ever'! (D&C 133:52)."⁷

When Christ died, the veil in the temple was split in two, symbolizing that the veil separating us from God was forever vaporized. Similarly, the earth also split open and the graves of the Saints were opened, who then arose and appeared to many (see Matthew 27:52-53). Without the Atonement and the Resurrection, no one would be able to return to the Father's presence (see 2 Nephi 9:8-10). But because of Him, all of us will one day return to account for our lives and be judged of our deeds. Every knee will bow before Him and humbly confess to God that Jesus is the Christ (see Mosiah 27:31; Romans 14:11). But not all of the blessings of the Atonement, as the Book of Mormon explains, are meant to be experienced in the hereafter.

EXAMPLES OF HIS MERCY FROM THE BOOK OF MORMON

The experiences recorded in the Book of Mormon teach us of the Savior's tender mercy by describing our Savior's personal attributes and showing how He helps us in this life. It testifies of His power to support us in our trials, warn us of danger, enlighten us, strengthen us where we are weak, deliver us from bondage, change our natures, shield us, give us peace, and encircle us in the arms of His mercy. In a devotional address delivered at Brigham Young University, President Merrill J. Bateman stated, "His personal knowledge,

7. Maxwell, "O How Great," 7.

his great love, and his atoning powers combine in tailoring his assistance to meet our peculiar needs. . . . He invites each person to come to him and establish a 'one by one' relationship through the Holy Spirit (see John 16:12-14; 3 Nephi 11:15; 17:21). . . . The Atonement involved more than an infinite mass of sin; it entailed an infinite stream of individuals with their specific needs."⁸

HE WILL SUSTAIN AND SUPPORT US

We are afflicted with a wide variety of trials. Part of the purpose for our mortal sojourn is to learn by "experience" the lessons and principles that are for our "good"—for the development of our character (see D&C 122:7). Coming into mortality is like being dropped off for a day at school. Although the tests and trials we face are different, there is equality in the testing process—all are tried one way or another. We are not free to choose the tests that come, but we are free to choose our response.

Some may be tested by a broken heart. To the pure in heart whose lives are filled with sorrow because of the abusive actions of loved ones, the prophet Jacob counseled: "Behold, I . . . would speak unto you that are pure in heart. Look unto God with firmness of mind, and pray unto him with exceeding faith, and he will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause, and send down justice upon those who seek your destruction. O all ye that are pure in heart, lift up your heads and receive the pleasing word of God, and feast upon his love; for ye may, if your minds are firm, forever" (Jacob 3:1-2).

When we experience unreciprocated love from those

8. Bateman, "One by One," 4-5.

closest to us, the Savior's love can fill our heart and His mercy can infuse our lives with hope.

HE WILL WARN US OF IMPENDING DANGER

Through His prophets, the Savior warned the people in Jerusalem that the Babylonian armies were coming (see 1 Nephi 1:4). He warned the Nephite armies where their enemies were camped and revealed where they should meet them in battle (see Alma 43:23-24). He warned the people about the consequences of sin and extended the "arms of mercy . . . towards them" if they would repent (Mosiah 16:12).

The Savior sees the future. He knows what is coming toward us and He will warn us by His Spirit, and through His prophets, so that we too can be safely enclosed in the arms of His mercy: "Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he said: Repent, and I will receive you" (Alma 5:33; see also 34:16).

Of course, we are free to choose that experience or not. As Lehi explained, "Men are free . . . to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death" (2 Nephi 2:27). Either we choose to partake of the tree of life or we choose the great and spacious building (see 1 Nephi 8).

As C. S. Lewis wisely observed, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened."⁹

9. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946), 72.

HE WILL ENLIGHTEN US

Samuel the Lamanite promised that, despite the mistakes and errors his people had made, they would be enlightened by the Spirit of the Lord and blessed because of their firm and steadfast faith in Christ (see Helaman 15:9–10). He taught that we must accomplish three things to obtain this blessing: come to a knowledge of the truth, not be deceived by false traditions, and believe in the holy scriptures and the prophecies of the prophets. The last, in turn, would lead us to faith on the Lord, to repentance, and would bring us a change of heart (see 15:7), all of which would make us firm, steadfast in the faith, and free (see 15:8).

Because the Savior knows all things (see 1 Nephi 9:6; Abraham 3:19), He can give us greater light and understanding than is possible to attain on our own (see Moroni 7:15–18; D&C 88:6–13; John 1:9). The Savior's words can enlarge our souls, expand our minds, and enlighten our understanding (see Alma 32:28, 34). What could be more enlightening than to be firm, steadfast, and free?

We live in a time of incredible discovery. But as wonderful as modern attainments may be, there is an age of even greater enlightenment coming. The Savior's future return to the earth will usher in the great millennial day when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (2 Nephi 21:9). To those who remain faithful to Him, the Savior will "arise with healing in his wings" (3 Nephi 25:2). He promised we would be "led up as calves of the stall" (1 Nephi 22:24; see also 3 Nephi 25:2). When calves who have spent their early life in the barn are led out into the pasture for the first time, they run and kick up their heels with excitement at all the newfound freedom. So it will be with us. Christ and His gospel give us more enlightenment about the purpose and meaning of life than any other individual or source. And when

He appears at the Second Coming, we will receive even more: "For since the beginning of the world have not men heard nor perceived by the ear, neither hath any eye seen, O God, besides thee, how great things thou hast prepared for him that waiteth for thee" (D&C 133:45).

Our joy and enlightenment will know no bounds (see 2 Nephi 8:3; 9:18; D&C 88:41, 49).

HE WILL STRENGTHEN AND DELIVER US

At a certain point in Book of Mormon history, two concurrent groups of Nephites, Limhi's people and Alma's people, were taken captive by their enemies. Although both groups were living near each other, and both faced similar circumstances, one group suffered more because they failed to seek the Lord's help. By comparing both groups, we can see how the Lord will deliver those who desire His help.

King Limhi's people, who relied on their own strength rather than turning to the Lord, were attacked without warning and were placed in bondage. Their enemies did "smite them on their cheeks, and exercise authority over them; and began to put heavy burdens up on their backs, and drive them as they would a dumb ass" (Mosiah 21:3). Despite the fact that they were surrounded on every side, they made three desperate attempts to escape by confronting the enemy. Each attempt resulted in great loss of life (see 21:7-12). They were humbled to the point of despair and submitted themselves "to be smitten, and to be driven to and fro, and burdened, according to the desires of their enemies" (21:13). In desperation they cried "mightily to God" that he would deliver them (21:14). But the "Lord was slow to hear their cry because of their iniquities; *nevertheless the Lord did hear their cries*" (21:15; emphasis added). He softened the hearts of their enemies, and "they began to ease their burdens; yet the Lord did not see fit

to deliver them out of bondage." He did, however, allow them to "prosper by degrees" (21:15-16).

After suffering for a time, Limhi and his people determined to escape. They paid extra tributes of wine to their captors, who became drunken. Then they secreted themselves away "by night into the wilderness," eventually finding safety with Mosiah's people in the land of Zarahemla (Mosiah 22:6-13).

Alma's people, on the other hand, had an entirely different experience because they first turned to the Lord for help. They were blessed and were "warned of the Lord" ahead of time that their enemies were coming (Mosiah 23:1). "The Lord did strengthen them" and led them to "a land, yea, even a very beautiful and pleasant land, a land of pure water" (23:2-4).

When they were about to be captured, "Alma went forth and stood among them, and exhorted them that they should not be frightened, but that they should remember the Lord their God and he would deliver them" (Mosiah 23:27).

"Therefore they hushed their fears, and began to cry unto the Lord that he would soften the hearts of the Lamanites, that they would spare them, and their wives, and their children. And it came to pass that the Lord did soften the hearts of the Lamanites. And Alma and his brethren went forth and delivered themselves up into their hands" (Mosiah 23:28-29). Not a single life was lost.

They were mistreated as Limhi's people had been, but Alma's people "did pour out their hearts" to God (Mosiah 24:12). "The voice of the Lord came to them in their afflictions, saying: Lift up your heads and be of good comfort," and they were told the Lord would "deliver them out of bondage" (24:13). God's mercy toward them was extended to their immediate needs; "And I will also ease the burdens which are put upon your shoulders, that even you cannot feel them

upon your backs, even while you are in bondage; and this will I do . . . that ye may know of a surety that *I, the Lord God, do visit my people in their afflictions*. . . . Yea, the Lord did strengthen them that they could bear up their burdens with ease, and they did submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord. And . . . so great was their faith and their patience that the voice of the Lord came unto them again, saying: Be of good comfort, for on the morrow I will deliver you out of bondage. And he said unto Alma: Thou shalt go before this people, and I will go with thee and deliver this people out of bondage" (24:14-17; emphasis added).

The next morning, the Lord "caused a deep sleep to come upon the Lamanites, yea, and all their task-masters were in a profound sleep" (Mosiah 24:19). Alma's people escaped into the wilderness, where they "poured out their thanks to God because he had been merciful unto them, and eased their burdens, and had delivered them out of bondage; for they were in bondage, and none could deliver them except it were the Lord their God" (24:21).

When their enemies tried to pursue them, the Lord revealed to Alma this word of comfort: "Haste thee and get thou and this people out of this land . . . and I will stop the Lamanites in this valley that they come no further in pursuit of this people" (Mosiah 24:23).

With no loss of life, with great blessings to ease their burden, with help to escape bondage, and protection after they were free, the Lord "did deliver them, and he did show forth his mighty power unto them, and great were their rejoicings" (Mosiah 23:24).

Later, the prophet Mormon observed that "those who were faithful in keeping the commandments of the Lord were delivered at all times" (Alma 50:22; see also Mosiah 29:19-20).

The Savior knows all things. While He may not always

remove the trials from our lives, His grace can bear us up against all the pressures surrounding us, regardless of the kinds of bondage we may find ourselves in. He knows how to help us, how to free us, and how to lead and protect us if we will but exercise faith in Him.

Some of the problems we experience are due to our refusal to come unto Christ (see D&C 84:49–50).

HE WILL SHIELD US

Satan seeks the destruction of all mankind, but particularly of those who strive to follow the Son and keep His commandments (see Revelation 12:12, 17). But the words of Christ are like an iron rod—sure, strong, and solid. Those who “hearken unto the word of God, and . . . hold fast unto it, they would never perish; neither could the temptations and the fiery darts of the adversary overpower them unto blindness, to lead them away to destruction” (1 Nephi 15:24). The iron rod, or the word of God, protects us in at least three ways: it keeps us on the strait and narrow path, it leads us to the tree of life, or to Christ, and it prevents us from falling over the edge and into the river of filthy water, that is, wickedness and worldliness (see 8:19–20).

Alma taught his son Helaman these great truths in this way: “And now, my son, remember the words which I have spoken unto you; . . . teach [the people] an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity. Preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; . . . *teach them to withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ.* Teach them to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly in heart; for such shall find rest to their souls. . . . Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be

full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day" (Alma 37:32-34, 37; emphasis added).

HE WILL CHANGE OUR NATURE

The tendency of the natural man is to give up hope, to quit trying, to say, "I'll never be able to succeed. That's just the way I am."

The Book of Mormon points out that the natural man has a defeatist attitude because he depends on his "own strength" and upon his "own wisdom" (Helaman 16:15). The natural man is quick to boast and "quick to be lifted up in pride" (12:5), "quick to do iniquity, and to be led away by the evil one" (Alma 46:8), quick to turn from righteousness to wickedness (see 3 Nephi 7:15), but slow to remember the Lord and "to give ear unto his counsels" (Helaman 12:5) and slow to choose Him to be a guide (see 12:5-6).

Even so, the message of the Book of Mormon is that Christ has power to change the natural man in us. The Book of Mormon testifies that the Savior can not only strengthen our character but over time change our nature and help us become even as He is.

Everything the Lord touches will change for the better—even if it has to go against its very nature. "Behold at his voice do the hills and the mountains tremble and quake" (Helaman 12:9). But if the Lord says "unto the earth—Move—it is moved. Yea, if he says unto the earth—Thou shalt go back, that it lengthen out the day for many hours—it is done" (12:13-15). But "if he says unto the waters of the great deep—Be thou dried up—it is done" (12:16). "If God . . . commanded . . . that I should say unto this water, be thou earth, it should be earth, . . . it would be done" (1 Nephi 17:50).

The tendency of the natural man is to be carnal, sensual, and devilish. But Christ can put the natural man in us to death

and change us so that we take upon us His divine nature and become righteous, spiritual, and saintly. The Savior has the power to change anything. The Book of Mormon bears witness that He can change us and help us reverse the natural tendencies of the fallen world and help us become even as He is: "For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint *through the atonement of Christ the Lord*" (Mosiah 3:19; emphasis added).

HE WILL GIVE US PEACE AND JOY

Because of what Christ did for us, we can repent of our sins, be baptized, be born again and experience this mighty change of heart, and inherit the kingdom of heaven. Our Savior is "mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness" (Alma 7:14).

He has promised that if we will "fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset" us, and "repent . . . and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments," that we will be cleansed and inherit eternal life (Alma 7:15).

"Wherefore," Nephi testified, "ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:20).

All through the Book of Mormon, whenever people followed the Savior's teachings, the prophets noted: "We lived after the manner of happiness" (2 Nephi 5:27); "There never was a happier time among the people" (Alma 50:23); "And surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God" (4 Nephi

1:16); "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (3 Nephi 22:13).

Perhaps the greatest example in the Book of Mormon of the peace and joy coming from the Savior's personal concern for us was when He knelt with and prayed for the people of 3 Nephi: "And behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written. . . . And after this manner do they bear record: The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; and no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; *and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father*" (3 Nephi 17:15-17; emphasis added). Truly there is no greater peace than that which comes from Christ (see John 14:27; Philippians 4:7).

HE WILL ENCIRCLE US IN THE ARMS OF HIS MERCY

Jacob testified that at the end of our journey along the path leading toward eternal life, the Savior stands to greet us: "The keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate" (2 Nephi 9:41). Why is He there? The prophet Mormon answered in his lamentation for his fallen people: "Jesus . . . stood with open arms to receive you" (Mormon 6:17). That is why He is there. He waits with "open arms" to encircle us, literally, in the arms of His mercy. "And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety" (Alma 34:16).

Elder Henry B. Eyring testified, "The Book of Mormon clearly teaches that God is aware of each of us. . . . He loves us individually. He knows us better than we know ourselves.

He wants us to come home again to His presence. That is His greatest priority."¹⁰

RECEIVING HIS BLESSINGS

The blessings of the Atonement are so marvelous. How do we receive them? There are many ways to receive His grace, but space allows us to describe a selected few:

1. *Enter into a covenant relationship with the Lord.* Baptism by immersion in water by one having priesthood authority is the introductory ordinance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is preceded by faith in Jesus Christ and repentance and must be followed by receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost to be complete (see 2 Nephi 31:13-14). Baptism opens the door to the Atonement. It makes remission of sin possible. Partaking of the sacrament each week allows us to renew our baptismal covenants with God, and He has promised that if we will do so and remember Him, we will have His Spirit to always be with us (see Moroni 4:3; 5:2).

2. *Nourish our souls with the words of Christ.* The Savior has promised that those who plant His words in their hearts, who carefully and diligently allow His words to take root in their souls, will see this seed swell in their breasts, enlarge their souls, enlighten their understanding, and become delicious to them. That seed will grow to become a "tree springing up unto everlasting life" (Alma 32:41). Christ is the Tree of Life (see 1 Nephi 11:4-6). Those who give diligent heed to His teachings will be led to Him and be able to partake of the fruit He offers us—His atonement—which is "most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast

10. Henry B. Eyring, "Open House Shares Message of Book of Mormon," *Church News*, 28 February 1998, 10.

upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst" (Alma 32:42).

3. *Love Him and thank Him for what He did.* It is not possible for us to fully comprehend how the Savior accomplished the Atonement, but it is not beyond our ability to express gratitude for what He did. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks declared: "Why is Christ the only way? How was it possible for him to take upon himself the sins of all mankind? Why was it necessary for his blood to be shed? And how can our soiled and sinful selves be cleansed by his blood? These are mysteries I do not understand. To me, as to President John Taylor, the miracle of the atonement of Jesus Christ is 'incomprehensible and inexplicable.'¹¹ But the Holy Ghost has given me a witness of its truthfulness, and I rejoice that I can spend my life in proclaiming it."¹²

4. *Love others.* Christ commanded ancient Israel, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18). At the Last Supper, He raised the standard: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you. . . . By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35; emphasis added). Love for others and a peaceable walk with them are distinguishing characteristics of those who have obtained sufficient hope through Christ to enter into God's rest (see Moroni 7:2-4).

5. *Strive to be like Him.* The Savior said, "What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am" (3 Nephi 27:27). By learning to follow His example and by striving to become as He is, we can receive His help. This

11. See John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1882), 148-49.

12. Dallin H. Oaks, "What Think Ye of Christ?" *Ensign*, November 1988, 6.

does not mean that we are perfect. Perfection is an eternal goal, not a mortal possibility. But He has promised the gifts of the Spirit for the benefit of those who seek to keep His commandments (see D&C 46:9).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell noted how the highest form of adoration is emulation: "One's realization about Jesus' role may commence with only an *acknowledgment* of Him, and ripen into real *appreciation*, then into deep *admiration* and finally, into reverent *emulation*. Our ultimate praise, therefore, is to pattern our lives after His."¹³

6. *Show mercy to others.* "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Psalm 103:8). He taught, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (3 Nephi 12:7). We can do this only if we take upon ourselves Christlike qualities. The Prophet Joseph Smith counseled: "Ever keep in exercise the principles of mercy, and be ready to forgive our brother on the first intimations of repentance, and asking forgiveness; and should we even forgive our brother, or even our enemy, before he repent or ask forgiveness, our Heavenly Father would be equally as merciful to us."¹⁴

A TIME TO REMEMBER

The major purpose of the Book of Mormon is to reveal Christ to us—not just the events of His life and sacrifice but the living reality of His nature and character. The Savior's concern for us is very real. He is personally involved in helping us. He is an eternal friend who has invited us to become His friends (see D&C 84:77). This is a friend "who knows us

13. Neal A. Maxwell, *One More Strain of Praise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 52.

14. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 155.

intimately, who stands by us in critical moments, and whose request is that we come to know him and his Father (see John 17:3).¹⁵

The Book of Mormon was written to help us remember His atonement, His resurrection, and especially His loving-kindness—that He has much tender mercy for us. As we enter a new millennial era in the history of Christianity, our study of the Book of Mormon can help us come to know the Savior's merciful nature and strengthen us to exercise greater faith in Him.

15. Bateman, "One by One," 4.