

Christ's Healing Influence in the Book of Mormon

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Recently some of my colleagues and I were walking up the ninth hole of a local golf course after practicing for our annual student/faculty department tournament. One of my friends commented, "Well, we just ruined a good walk." It seems that happens frequently when I combine a walk with golf. In contrast, I hope that our "walk" together this hour will be edifying for each of us.

President Ezra Taft Benson declared that the Book of Mormon would be the main instrument in the latter-day gathering of people to Christ. It was true for me in my conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints some 37 years ago. I have grown to love the book and Him of whom the book testifies.

Nephi, in the opening chapter, declares his intent in writing when he says, "I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen" (1 Nephi 1:20). Moroni, in the last chapter of the book, invites us to receive the record by willfully casting away unbelief and to ask God of its truthfulness as it describes "how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men" (Moroni 10:3). Hence the first and last chapters provide the reason why the authors and preservers of the plates labored for us to have this great record. When I am privileged to teach a Book of Mormon class, I tell the students that if

they do not find the Savior and the reference to His mercy and healing influence in all that they will read, they will have missed the point that the authors and editors were making.

I will discuss both Book of Mormon and modern examples of how the Savior's teachings and/or the extension of His mercy through His unselfish act of the Atonement brought healing. As I do so, please ponder your own experiences in order to "liken all scriptures unto us" (1 Nephi 19:23).

King Benjamin described his people as "a diligent people in keeping the commandments of the Lord" (Mosiah 1:11). King Benjamin subsequently told about being visited by an angel who taught him "glad tidings of great joy" concerning Christ (Mosiah 3:3). He gathered his people for a final address and spoke to them about the Atonement and of our divine indebtedness. He taught that all we can attempt to give back to the Father and the Son is our gratitude, obedience, and service. Following this great discourse, his people fell to the earth because "they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the

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dust of the earth” (Mosiah 4:2). Even though they had been diligent in keeping God’s commandments, after hearing about the Savior’s mission, their hearts were changed.

I sometimes find myself caught up in the busyness of life and the sometimes seemingly blind obedience to rules that comes, as Jacob warned, from “looking beyond the mark” (Jacob 4:14). President Benson’s counsel to daily feast on the Book of Mormon and on its testimony of Jesus helps me to focus on what matters most in my life: my relationship with the Father and the Son.

Buried in the war chapters in the book of Alma, there is a wonderful lesson about the healing influence of the Savior. At one point the sons of King Mosiah are described as being “the very vilest of sinners,” but “the Lord saw fit in his infinite mercy to spare them” (Mosiah 28:4). After their change-of-heart experience, they asked to go “impart the word of God to their brethren, the Lamanites. . . . For they could not bear that any human soul should perish” (Mosiah 28:1, 3). Later in the record, Mormon described the great general Moroni: “If all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever” (Alma 48:17). Mormon obviously had some tender feelings for this man and probably even named his own son after him. But Mormon, wanting to teach an important lesson, added these words in the next verse:

Behold, he was a man like unto Ammon, the son of Mosiah, yea, and even the other sons of Mosiah, yea, and also Alma and his sons, for they were all men of God. [Alma 48:18]

The sons of Mosiah went from being “the very vilest of sinners” to being men like Moroni and “men of God.” This was only possible because of the Atonement and the life-changing, healing influence it has on the children of men.

All of us will feel the pain of sin and transgression in our lives. The Savior’s act of redemption can take away that pain. I have witnessed this marvelous experience as individuals have accepted the Lord, repented, asked His forgiveness, and then felt the tremendous burden of guilt be washed away. Rebellious young people have turned to the Lord and served wonderful missions. Couples struggling with pride and selfishness have humbled themselves and invited the Lord to help them find solutions to their relationship problems. I acknowledge and express gratitude for the Savior’s role in my own conversion and for the daily application of His forgiveness in my life.

Alma the Younger went to the people of Ammonihah to “preach the word of God” and bear “pure testimony” (Alma 4:19). He was directed to the home of Amulek, who fed and cared for him. Later, Amulek defended Alma as “a holy man” and witnessed: “He hath blessed me, and my women, and my children” (Alma 10:9, 11). Alma and Amulek were bound and placed in prison for their preaching. Those that believed on their words were stoned and cast out of the city. Alma and Amulek were then forced to watch the martyrdom of the wives and children of the believers. “And when Amulek saw the pains of the women and children who were consuming in the fire, he also was pained” (Alma 14:10). During one reading of this account, I wondered where Amulek’s own wife and children were and considered the possibility that he might have watched them die in the fire. We read later in the account that Alma “took him [Amulek] to his own house, and did administer unto him in his tribulations, and strengthened him in the Lord” (Alma 15:18).

Three years ago I lost both of my parents. Although not members of our faith, they had led good, Christian lives. My father passed away 30 days short of their 66th wedding anniversary, and my mother died exactly 30 days

after that anniversary date. A little over a year later, my wife, some of our children, and I gathered in the Provo Temple to perform sacred ordinances for them and for me to be sealed to them. I will ever be grateful for the Lord's healing influence at the time of their deaths and for His sustaining spirit as we met for that sweet experience in the temple. I know that the Savior loosed the "bands of death" and made it possible to again be with our departed loved ones.

Sometime following the destruction that attended the Savior's Crucifixion, a group of Nephites gathered at the temple in Bountiful. While there, they heard a voice that said, "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (3 Nephi 11:7). Then they witnessed the Savior descending out of heaven and declaring:

Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world.

And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning. [3 Nephi 11:10–11]

His first words on that glorious occasion addressed His obedience to His Father's will. It is also interesting to note that from the first words that we have recorded about His pre-mortal existence, we learn that the Savior volunteered to go and perform the Father's work. The first words that we have of His mortal life are to tell His mortal mother that He must be about His Father's business. And among the last words that we have of His mortal life is His stated willingness to submit to the Father's will instead of to His own.

What is so important for you and me to know and understand about Him—not only doing but also *wanting* to do the will of the Father? Certainly we need to learn that the

Savior placed a premium on obedience and sacrifice and that we should as well. Another important lesson is that He loved the Father and us more than Himself. The Savior demonstrated that love to the people at Bountiful when He invited them to come forth "one by one" to feel the wounds in his side, hands, and feet (3 Nephi 11:15) and then later as He blessed their sick and afflicted and "their little children, one by one" (3 Nephi 17:21). Yet another lesson is found in His statement "For the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do" (3 Nephi 27:21). If we want to yield our will to the Father's, we must live the laws of obedience and sacrifice and let our love for the Father and the Son govern our thoughts and actions.

As I was finishing graduate school years ago, I was blessed with several job offers. My wife and I were trying to decide where we wanted to live instead of where the Lord wanted us to live. We prayed for another offer that would allow us to live close to both of our families. The offer didn't come, and we grew a bit frustrated and impatient. One day while my wife was sitting in Relief Society, her thoughts became more focused on the Savior's will instead of on her own, and almost immediately she saw the words written in her mind of the location of the offer that we were to accept. When she told me of her experience, my own prayers changed and I was blessed with a similar confirmation. We accepted that offer, and the associations and the experiences that have resulted have enriched our lives. I'm grateful for a wife whose love for the Lord and desire to do His will guide her thoughts and actions and help me with mine.

Near the end of the Book of Mormon, we read of the great social, political, and personal unrest in which the prophet Mormon lived. Indeed, Mormon said, "A continual scene of wickedness and abominations has been before mine eyes ever since I have been sufficient

to behold the ways of man” (Mormon 2:18). Nevertheless, Mormon went on to write to

the peaceable followers of Christ . . . that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven. [Moroni 7:3]

Note that there are two “rests” mentioned in this verse. The first reference suggests that we can experience “the rest of the Lord” in this life. We live in a time in which cherished values are being sacrificed under the guise of self-serving interpretations of words like *tolerance* and *acceptance* and when physical and spiritual warfare dominates news headlines. But in all of the confusion, in all of the mounting turmoil and unrest, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can lead us to a “peaceable walk with the children of men” (Moroni 7:4). I find it interesting and reassuring to note that Joseph Smith received section 87 (often referred to as the revelation on war) on the 25th of December—the day the world celebrates the birth of Him who provides our needed hope and peace. I testify that He is willing to provide help with all of our concerns, however large or small they may appear.

Several years ago I was on a consulting assignment to provide three weeks of professional engineering training in London. I was traveling with carry-ons, two large suitcases, and several boxes of workshop materials. As I was making arrangements to get on London’s underground transportation that would take me from the airport to my hotel, I heard a message that unattended luggage would be seized and individuals detained for questioning. I knew that I could not get off the train without leaving pieces of my luggage unattended. I began to pray and ask the Lord for help. Not long before my stop, I was amazed to see two young men dressed in suits with our Church’s missionary name tags get on the large train with its several passenger cars and sit down

next to *me!* I was further amazed to discover that they were getting off at my stop! As you can imagine, I offered a silent prayer of gratitude. My anxiety in this situation may seem trivial compared to the anxiety and stress that we live in today, but it was a testimony of the Lord’s awareness of my plight and His willingness to help. I am certain that He is anxious to help each of us in our “peaceable walk with the children of men.”

After the terrible battle at Cumorah, Moroni assumed responsibility of the records and noted that he had “but few things to write” (Mormon 8:1). We get a sense of his despair when he wrote:

I even remain alone to write the sad tale of the destruction of my people. . . .

. . . Whither I go it mattereth not.

. . . My father hath been slain in battle, and all my kinsfolk, and I have not friends nor whither to go; and how long the Lord will suffer that I may live I know not. [Mormon 8:3–5]

He was discouraged and without hope and even appeared to have ended his record when he wrote, “I make an end of speaking concerning this people” (Mormon 8:13). But he lived for another 20-plus years and added much to the plates. In his additional comments, his tone appears to be transformed as he provides some of the most profound comments on faith, hope, and charity that we have in all scripture. What caused the change? Listen to what he wrote to us: “And then shall ye know that I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face” (Ether 12:39).

When the Lord is our companion, as I believe He was for Moroni, we are never alone. The Savior knew what it was like to be left alone when He worked out the Atonement. He provided the companionship and comfort that Moroni needed during this difficult time. Many people, for a variety of reasons, experience feelings of loneliness during their lives. The Lord

in His infinite mercy can provide the solace that all such people are desperately seeking.

A story told by President Steve Studdert at a session of the Mount Timpanogos Temple dedication dramatically illustrates this. I repeat it with his permission. Before the temple dedication, the First Presidency invited the residents of the Utah State Developmental Center to a special open house of the temple. This center houses severely mentally and physically disabled sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. I now quote from President Studdert's account:

There was a man in his mid-sixties in the center. He had been there since age eight, and it had been 15 years since any family members had been to visit him. They had understandably quit coming because he never spoke to them, never showed any indication of recognition, and never expressed anything whatsoever to them. But on that morning the Spirit worked on this man's brother, also in his mid-sixties, that today was the day for that overdue visit.

Together with his wife, somewhat apprehensively the brother walked into the room of his handicapped younger brother, not knowing what to expect. The brother, who we will respectfully call Fred, was dressed in his best clothes and waiting somewhat impatiently in his wheelchair. Seeing his older brother, Fred immediately broke into a wide smile, stood up, and embraced him with a not-so-gentle bear hug. There was sweet recognition for the first time ever.

So with a happy eye toward the temple, they ventured out. As Fred's wheelchair was pushed across the street, he began to become increasingly unsettled. His brother became concerned, recognizing that Fred had not left his residence for many years and that maybe this unusual experience or the crowds were too much for him. They considered returning Fred to his residence, but the Spirit whispered, "Carry on." As they entered the temple, Fred seemingly grew even more agitated. But they felt impressed to continue.

About 50 feet behind the temple recommend desk is a beautiful painting of the Savior depicted as a shepherd lovingly holding in His protective arms a small black lamb, symbolic of a tender lost lamb. This particular [Minerva Teichert] painting had never before been displayed in any temple.

As the three of them approached this powerful painting, Fred stopped his wheelchair and looked upward at the painting. And then in a voice as clear as any voice ever heard, [he] spoke one simple word: "Jesus." This was the first understandable word anyone had ever heard him speak in his entire life, and he did so with certainty, clarity, and knowledge. He then folded his arms in the same manner as the Savior's arms in the painting.

In that moment he grew silent and calm; peace flooded over his anxious mind and nervous body. His arms relaxed and remained firmly folded as were the Savior's. They proceeded on the tour of the temple, quiet and reverential.

On the wide sidewalls of the magnificent celestial room are large mirrors. As they reached that point in the tour, Fred stopped the wheelchair and stood. Without movement or speech, he looked for several minutes into those mirrors. It was as if he were looking into an unseen eternity. [And, if I might interject, possibly seeing a time in the future when the Resurrection will make him whole.] Then he sat in his wheelchair, again folded his arms as did the Savior in the painting, and remained quiet all the way back to his room. . . .

Since that day in the Lord's house, Fred has never again spoken an understandable word. The only word he has ever spoken is "Jesus." [Stephen M. Studdert, personal account]

This incredible story illustrates to me the love that the Savior has for each of us. No one goes unnoticed. He is aware of everyone and of everyone's concerns. Even when it seems like people can't or won't respond to His attempts to reach out to them, He continues to communicate His love.

I bear testimony that the Lord is mindful of each of us, and if we come to Him, we can find peace and hope in our times of need.

For can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee, O house of Israel.

Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands. [1 Nephi 21:15–16]

The Book of Mormon does testify of Christ and His healing influence. I am grateful for the authors and the preservers of the plates who made it possible for us to read these marvel-

ous accounts of the Lord extending the arms of His love to those in need. It was written for our day when we need similar applications of His mercy. Like Nephi of old, I declare that

he shall rise from the dead, with healing in his wings. . . . Wherefore, my soul delighteth to prophesy concerning him, . . . and my heart doth magnify his holy name. [2 Nephi 25:13]

We are divinely and eternally indebted to Him. I pray that we will love Him as He loved us and demonstrate that love through our gratitude, obedience, and service. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.