

Journey to a Land of Promise—Obtaining Charity

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Being a student at Brigham Young University was a privilege for me. BYU became a place where I learned to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith.”¹ Whenever I drive through the entrance of BYU’s campus, I am reminded by the sign “Enter to learn; go forth to serve” that what I learned and experienced here prepared me well to support my family and to contribute to the Church and community everywhere I went.²

I also remember that I enjoyed listening to incredible speakers at Tuesday devotionals more than thirty years ago. Considering the respect I felt for those who spoke and the inspiration I received, I never imagined I would stand in the middle of the Marriott Center to give an address to so many students and faculty. I feel very humbled by the assignment to address you today. I hope the insights and learnings I share with you might help you in some way.

In addition to receiving a first-class education here, one signature learning of mine at BYU was gaining an unwavering conviction of the Book of

Mormon. The Book of Mormon has become my compass to help me navigate through the ups and downs of my life. President Russell M. Nelson reminded us that “the truths of the Book of Mormon have the *power* to heal, comfort, restore, succor, strengthen, console, and cheer our souls.”³ I too have felt the power of the Book of Mormon throughout my life. I can honestly say with my head high that I did “enter [BYU] to learn” and that the Book of Mormon continues to support me to “go forth to serve” in the world with that power.

The Book of Mormon—An Inspired Textbook for Life

Today I want to share several examples of how the Book of Mormon is an inspired “textbook” for life that will help us to

- Liken the scriptures to ourselves
- Come to know Christ
- Acquire Christlike attributes, particularly charity

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Examples are readily found in the journey of Nephi's family. Their experiences in leaving Jerusalem and traveling to a land of promise can serve as your life's compass. Furthermore, having seen a vision of Christ and His ministry, Nephi sought to develop the Christlike character of charity through relying on God amid his trials. You can recognize God's dealings with Nephi's family as His way of refining them to become like Him. I truly agree with Joseph Smith as he introduced the Book of Mormon with his statement "that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth" and that you can become "nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."⁴

Perhaps my learning from Nephi's journey may have been attributed to repetitious reading of 1 Nephi after struggling to read the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi. Nevertheless, I have profited and learned so much from likening Nephi's journey unto my life again and again.⁵ Nephi's accounts led me to experience "a change of heart," receiving "the image God . . . upon [my countenance]."⁶

Sometimes we might find it difficult to relate to Nephi's journey in the wilderness with all our modern-day comforts, such as air conditioners, exercise shoes, and automobiles. Even with these mismatches in comparing Nephi's days to ours, we can truly appreciate the enduring power of the word of God.⁷ Furthermore, as we search diligently, we will feel the power of the Holy Ghost and recognize that the principles Nephi shared with us are time-tested and true, no matter where or when we live.⁸

Permit me to share several episodes from Nephi's journey that have helped me know the Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ and that illustrate how we can develop Christlike attributes.

Leaving Jerusalem

Have you ever thought about what leaving Jerusalem means to you? What is your Jerusalem? What would you need to leave behind? After Lehi saw in vision a pillar of fire and read from a book of prophecy, it was made known to him about the destruction of Jerusalem. Despite his efforts to warn the people he cared about, many

of their hearts were so hardened that they persecuted him.⁹ Lehi was then commanded to take his family and leave Jerusalem. Lehi obeyed the word of the Lord and departed into the wilderness, leaving both his house and his inheritance.¹⁰

As I think about Lehi's circumstances, I am able to connect his experience to my own opportunity when I first received the restored gospel of Jesus Christ by being baptized and had begun understanding that I was a child of God and that I can become like God. I was only fifteen years old when I began learning the gospel from missionaries. In order to commit to be baptized and to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, I felt that I would have to discontinue some of the traditions and practices that were deeply rooted in Buddhism and Shintoism. To my family, joining the Church and becoming a follower of Jesus Christ seemed so foreign. They must have thought I was simply a rebellious teenage boy.

Instead, I hoped that living the gospel of Jesus Christ might help me honor my father and mother better, and I hoped that they might eventually appreciate the truths I had found. This was a confusing situation for a young boy, but I was so comforted by the words of Jesus Christ, and I found much joy and peace by adhering to His message. What gave me courage were the words of Jesus Christ when He said:

*Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*¹¹

For me, following the Savior by being baptized became my application of leaving my own Jerusalem and becoming "a new creature" in Christ.¹² Even though at that time my parents did not like the choice I had made, over time they supported my decision to follow the Savior. More than thirty years later, my mother chose to follow the Savior by being baptized and becoming a member of the Church.

Serving a full-time mission became another instance in which I left my own Jerusalem. Here is a picture taken with my Japanese companion when I was a young missionary in Salt Lake City.

[A photo was shown.] I was assigned to serve on Temple Square at that time. We used to have some handsome elders on Temple Square. This photo was the official image used for Sunday School for many years.

It bothered me when my friends and acquaintances outside the Church thought I had gone completely crazy. Yet I had committed to depart from “the natural man . . . through the atonement of Christ.”¹³ I sought to become like Nephi, who remained faithful in obeying God’s commandments even when his older brothers thought he was a fool or lacked judgment.¹⁴

Finding “a Land of Promise”

How about finding your own “land of promise”?¹⁵ What does that teach us about obedience to God’s commandments?

Despite his brothers’ rebellion, young Nephi had “great desires to know of the mysteries of God” and “did cry unto the Lord.” As a result, “[God] did visit [him], and did soften [his] heart.”¹⁶ The Lord blessed Nephi with the knowledge of a promised land, one “which is choice above all other lands.”¹⁷ Nephi was told that he would be led to that land and would prosper if he would keep the commandments of God.¹⁸ The Lord prepared the land for Nephi and blessed him because of the “lowliness of [his] heart.”¹⁹

The blessings of the promised land will be given as an inheritance to all the Lord’s faithful followers and their descendants. While I was a student at BYU, I often pondered about my own promised land, where I would establish my life after completing my education—a place in which I might be blessed both spiritually and temporally someday.

We see that those who inherited the promised land repeatedly demonstrated the challenges of remaining obedient. The Lord remembered His promise to bless Nephi. After arriving in the land of promise, Nephi and his followers “lived after the manner of happiness.”²⁰ Throughout the Book of Mormon, you will find that those who kept the covenants with God were blessed to retain the Spirit of God and to have peace without contention. They were fully converted unto Jesus Christ: “They had all things common . . . [without] rich

and poor, bond and free.”²¹ They experienced “all manner of miracles”²² because many disciples ministered to the people in the manner that Jesus had taught them.²³

Nephi’s Desire to Know of His Father’s Dream and of Christ

What does Nephi teach us about coming to know Christ? In his dream or vision, Lehi saw a tree whose fruit was desirable to make one happy. He partook of it, and it lifted his “soul with exceedingly great joy,” and he desired to share it with his family.²⁴ In the dream, as Lehi shared the fruit with Nephi, he gladly received it.²⁵ He rejoiced in the truth with his father. We know the fruit he partook of was most desirable and represented the love of God—or charity—in the form of the tree of life.²⁶

Nephi “desire[d] to behold the things which [his] father saw.”²⁷ When asked by the Spirit if he believed the vision he had been shown, Nephi said, “I believe all the words of my father,” though he did not understand the full meaning of his dream.²⁸

The Spirit asked Nephi, “Knowest thou the condescension of God?” and Nephi replied by saying, “I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things.”²⁹

Nephi was learning the most important knowledge of all. From his reply, you can sense his spiritual commitment to God to hold nothing back. Nephi was learning one of the attributes of charity: “believeth all things.”³⁰ You can have faith and peace of mind that one day there will be answers to all your questions, even if you may not understand them now.³¹

The Spirit continued to speak to Nephi, who was then privileged to behold the virgin bearing a child in her arms. He beheld the Lamb of God, the Son of the Eternal Father, even Jesus Christ.³² After seeing the Lamb of God, Nephi was able to associate the tree of life with the love of God. He said, “It is the most desirable above all things.”³³

Unfortunately, Laman and Lemuel did not show much interest in what their father saw. However, Lehi did not give up hope for his children. The book of 1 Nephi captured Lehi’s unwavering hope for his children as Nephi observed that his father

“did exhort them then with all the feeling of a tender parent” to follow God.³⁴

Later, Nephi, having observed his father teach his older brethren, also “did exhort them with all the energies of [his] soul, and with all the faculty which [he] possessed, that they would give heed to the word of God.”³⁵ Nephi gave his best effort to persuade his brothers to believe in Christ. Nephi later shared his testimony of the Atonement of Christ, testifying that “it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.”³⁶

It is not our achievements that save us but Christ’s grace and His acceptance of our efforts—or, as the scriptures put it, “the heart and a willing mind.”³⁷

Developing Christlike Attributes and Charity

As we can see, Nephi gained Christlike attributes through his trials and tribulations after having gained a witness of Christ and of his mission for himself. In his journey toward the promised land, Nephi saw the Savior and felt His love. Nephi received the constant guidance of the Spirit, refined his life, and eventually developed Christlike attributes. One important attribute Christ possesses is charity, or “the pure love of Christ.”³⁸

Mormon described charity as follows:

*Charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*³⁹

The apostle Paul also taught the same principle of charity. His teachings can give us a bold perspective. He said, “Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.”⁴⁰ Mormon further reminded us to “cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all.”⁴¹ As we read of what Nephi learned, we see that he cleaved unto charity. He never let go of what he gained spiritually, and he remained true to the faith his father Lehi cherished.

The remaining Book of Mormon episodes that I will share illustrate how, with a firm testimony of Christ, we can be refined and filled with charity

despite life’s uncertainties. A true test of charity—or the pure love of Christ—is trusting God’s love enough to move forward, sometimes without knowledge, believing without leaning on our own desires and understanding.⁴²

Returning to Jerusalem to Obtain the Brass Plates—Charity “Suffereth Long,” “Seeketh Not Her Own,” and “Bearth All Things”

After leaving Jerusalem, Lehi was commanded that his sons should return to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates. Have you ever wondered why the Lord did not command Lehi to obtain the brass plates from Laban before he and his family left Jerusalem? It might have spared extra pain and heartache for the entire family. Nevertheless, Nephi’s family learned the critical elements of charity: being long-suffering, seeking the will of the Lord rather than their own, and bearing all things they received along the way.

After Nephi brought the plates to his father, Lehi learned that the brass plates contained the records of prophets from the beginning and a genealogy of his forefathers.⁴³ This critical task to obtain the brass plates was given to the children, not the parents. The sons were asked to do “a hard thing”⁴⁴ by risking their own lives.

While the brothers murmured, Nephi was full of faith when he said, “I will go and do.”⁴⁵ Nephi trusted that the Lord would prepare a way for them to achieve this important work. His father, Lehi, rejoiced when Nephi expressed his willingness to follow the Lord. However, the sons were not able to obtain the records in their first two attempts. Laban first threatened Laman’s life, and Laban lusted after Lehi’s inheritance, including gold, silver, and all manner of precious things. Laban thrust the sons out, sending his servants to kill them,⁴⁶ and Nephi and his brothers fled and “hid [them]selves in the cavity of a rock.”⁴⁷

As you know, Nephi did not give up. He found a way to obtain the plates, being “led by the Spirit, not knowing beforehand the things which [he] should do.”⁴⁸ Though it was not easy, Nephi received much strength from the Lord to achieve what was required of him. Nephi learned to bear and endure all sorts of challenges. He learned to seek the will of the Lord instead of his own.

While Nephi and his brothers were absent, Sariah, as a mother, worried about her children and their safety. Lehi did his best to comfort Sariah, saying the Lord would deliver their sons and they would return.⁴⁹ Lehi remained steadfast and kept his faith. Both Sariah and Lehi bore their respective challenges until the Lord brought back their sons, who had accomplished what the Lord commanded them. Through this long-suffering, both Sariah and Lehi gained further witness “after the trial of [their] faith.”⁵⁰ Sariah gained her own conviction that the Lord had truly commanded Lehi to send her sons to Jerusalem and that the Lord had protected them.⁵¹ Lehi further gained the witness that it was truly a commandment of the Lord to send Lehi’s children to obtain the plates, as he found that the records “were desirable” and “of great worth” to his family and posterity as they traveled in the wilderness.⁵²

Journey in the Wilderness—Charity Is “Not Puffed Up,” “Thinketh No Evil,” and “Envieth Not”

Here is a good word for likening the scriptures to our own challenging circumstances: *wilderness*. A wilderness can have different connotations for everyone. What do you see in your wilderness? Some might think about a desert in Utah—with hot and dry weather and never-ending sagebrush—while others might think of an island surrounded by ocean. What seems common is that a wilderness is a lonely place.

In the book of Ether, Moroni described the wilderness as a place where no man had been.⁵³ When struggling alone, we might suffer from a “myopic” view, as President Russell M. Nelson has described.⁵⁴ You might say, “I am the only person with a problem. No one understands and cares about me.” When you experience this sort of feeling, you might be in your personal wilderness.

The Lord, for example, commanded the brother of Jared to “go forth into the wilderness”⁵⁵—not just telling him to “go into” the wilderness but encouraging him to approach his problem courageously and with purpose. Amulek taught, “Ye must pour out your souls . . . in your wilderness,”⁵⁶ teaching us to always remember God, no matter how lonely we might feel.

Please pay attention to the positive words of Nephi when he and his family

wade[d] through much affliction in the wilderness. . . .

*And so great were the blessings of the Lord upon us, that while we did live upon raw meat in the wilderness, our women did give plenty of suck for their children, and were strong, yea, even like unto the men; and they began to bear their journeyings without murmurings.*⁵⁷

As an aside, I must say that the raw meat, and especially raw fish, sounds good to me. I don’t think anyone in Nephi’s family had the ability to prepare raw fish—sashimi or sushi—in those days.

Back to Nephi and his family: their ability to bear their wilderness journey without murmuring is a great example of overcoming pride by being a disciple who is “not puffed up,” “thinketh no evil,” and “envieth not.” When you receive all things with gratefulness, as Nephi did, you can truly understand the will of God, even in your trials,⁵⁸ and can believe that all things “shall be made glorious.”⁵⁹

Building a Ship and Persevering Through Never-Ending Oppositions—Charity “Is Kind,” “Not Easily Provoked,” and “Endureth All Things”

As they sojourned in the wilderness for the space of many years, the Lord nourished Nephi and his family spiritually because they kept the commandments of God.⁶⁰ Then they came to a land near the seashore, which they “called Bountiful, because of its much fruit and also wild honey.”⁶¹

After Nephi and his family had pitched their tents, “the voice of the Lord came unto [Nephi], saying: Arise, and get thee into the mountain” to cry unto the Lord.⁶²

Have you established a place where God might speak to you? Have you established a place where you can communicate with God? Many of you would say that is the temple, or you may have your own sacred place in your apartment to pray.

In the mountain where Nephi prayed, the Lord commanded Nephi to construct a ship so that he and his family could get to the land of promise.⁶³ Nephi “did not work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men . . . ; but [he] did build [the ship] after the manner which the Lord had shown unto [him].”⁶⁴ Nephi was not commanded to go into the mount only one time; instead, he “did go into the mount oft, and [he] did pray oft

unto the Lord; [and] the Lord showed unto [Nephi] great things.”⁶⁵

May I remind you that your experiences here at BYU are preparing you to go forth to serve? You are blessed with many opportunities to seek God’s direction⁶⁶ and to prepare your own unique ship built through “study and also by faith.”

Amid trials and opposition while traveling in your wilderness and crossing your own ocean, you might feel ready to make an excuse or to crumble. Nephi did not succumb to opposition. Even when his brothers would not support him and bound him with cords,⁶⁷ Nephi continued in his love for them. He “did frankly forgive them all that they had done”⁶⁸ and remembered to pray to God.⁶⁹ He remained faithful to God and was filled with the Holy Ghost.

While in the ship crossing the sea, Nephi was bound by his brothers again, and he endured their opposition without murmuring. Instead, he praised God “all the day long.”⁷⁰ Through his trials, Nephi learned to yield “to the enticings of the Holy Spirit”⁷¹ and to rely on the Atonement of Christ.

From leaving Jerusalem until he arrived in the land of promise, Nephi endured all things and all trials, learned to become “kind,” and gained the attribute of being “not easily provoked.” He completely trusted that the Lord would lead him to the promised land.⁷²

“Pray unto the Father with All the Energy of Heart”

In reviewing these episodes from Nephi’s journey, did you notice how Nephi gained the attribute of charity? As you read and apply Nephi’s experiences of learning of and becoming like Jesus Christ, I hope you will feel the great power and wisdom of the Book of Mormon. Today I only reviewed these several episodes briefly to illustrate the relationship between Nephi’s journey, his knowledge of Christ, and his development of the Christlike attribute of charity. I hope that you can find your own verses from 1 Nephi relating to the Savior’s matchless love for us and that you can come to appreciate the depth of the scriptures.

I invite you to liken the scriptures to your own life and to “become even as Nephi of old, who journeyed from Jerusalem in the wilderness.”⁷³

He was truly guided by the Lord and was “taught from on high.”⁷⁴ The blessings associated with the trials in our lives are to become closer to the Lord and to develop the characteristics of charity, even the pure love of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, I invite you to do as Mormon admonished us: to “pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love.”⁷⁵ I hope and pray that you can learn from Nephi and from other prophets in the Book of Mormon who did reach out to God through humble prayer. I hope your time at BYU will become even more meaningful as you recognize that you are building your own ship to be able to sail through the trials and challenges that come in your life. Let me remind you of your divine identity and potential as spirit children of God. By living the precepts in the Book of Mormon, you will learn of and become like our Savior, Jesus Christ.

I bear you my witness of Heavenly Father and the Savior’s love for us. Heavenly Father hears and answers your prayers. He sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Through His matchless love for you, His infinite Atonement will enable you to become like Him and Heavenly Father. When the Savior comes again, we shall see Him as He is. May we be purified, even as He is pure. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Doctrine and Covenants 88:118.
2. See “Seeking Learning by Study and by Faith,” chapter 10 in *The Gospel and the Productive Life: Teacher Manual, Religion 150* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2017), 45–50.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like Without It?” *Ensign*, November 2017; emphasis in original.
4. Joseph Smith, *HC* 4:461 (28 November 1841); quoted in the Book of Mormon, introduction.
5. See 1 Nephi 19:22–23.
6. Alma 5:26, 19.
7. “The word of the Lord endureth for ever” (1 Peter 1:25).
8. I am amazed at the power of the word of God. The following verses better articulate my appreciation for the scriptures: see Proverbs 12:19;

1 Peter 1:24–25; 1 Nephi 10:19; Jacob 4:13; Doctrine and Covenants 93:24.

9. See 1 Nephi 1:6, 11–13, 18–20.

10. See 1 Nephi 2:1–4.

11. Matthew 19:29.

12. 2 Corinthians 5:17. To become a new creature in Christ, one must follow the Savior's invitation to have faith in Him, repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, and endure to the end. The entire chapter of 2 Nephi 31 teaches this important doctrine of Christ.

13. Mosiah 3:19; see also verse 17.

14. See 1 Nephi 17:17, 19.

15. 1 Nephi 2:20.

16. 1 Nephi 2:16.

17. 1 Nephi 2:20.

18. See 1 Nephi 2:20; see also Ether 2:12.

19. 1 Nephi 2:19; see also verse 20.

20. 2 Nephi 5:27.

21. 4 Nephi 1:3.

22. 4 Nephi 1:5.

23. See 4 Nephi 1:2–5, 13, 15–17.

24. 1 Nephi 8:12.

25. See 1 Nephi 8:16.

26. See 1 Nephi 11:21–23.

27. 1 Nephi 11:3.

28. 1 Nephi 11:5; see also verse 4.

29. 1 Nephi 11:16–17.

30. 1 Corinthians 13:7; Moroni 7:45.

31. See Robert C. Oaks, "Believe All Things," *Ensign*, July 2005.

32. See 1 Nephi 11:14–15, 18–21.

33. 1 Nephi 11:22; see also verse 21.

34. 1 Nephi 8:37.

35. 1 Nephi 15:25.

36. 2 Nephi 25:23.

37. Doctrine and Covenants 64:34. See Donald L. Hallstrom, "The Lord Requireth the Heart and a Willing Mind," BYU–Idaho devotional address, 17 May 2005; later published as "The Heart and a Willing Mind," *Ensign*, June 2011. See also Hallstrom, "The Heart and a Willing Mind," BYU devotional address, 7 December 2010.

38. Moroni 7:47.

39. Moroni 7:45.

40. 1 Corinthians 13:2.

41. Moroni 7:46.

42. See Proverbs 3:5.

43. See 1 Nephi 5:10–14, 16.

44. 1 Nephi 3:5; see also verses 1–5.

45. 1 Nephi 3:7.

46. See 1 Nephi 3:21–26.

47. 1 Nephi 3:27.

48. 1 Nephi 4:6.

49. See 1 Nephi 5:5–6.

50. Ether 12:6.

51. See 1 Nephi 5:8.

52. 1 Nephi 5:21; see also verse 22.

53. See Ether 2:5: "wilderness, . . . that quarter where there never had man been."

54. See Russell M. Nelson, "Let God Prevail," *Ensign*, November 2020.

55. Ether 2:5; emphasis added.

56. Alma 34:26.

57. 1 Nephi 17:1–2.

58. See 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "In every thing give thanks."

59. Doctrine and Covenants 78:19: "He who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious."

60. See 1 Nephi 17:3–4.

61. 1 Nephi 17:5.

62. 1 Nephi 17:7; see also verse 6.

63. See 1 Nephi 17:8.

64. 1 Nephi 18:2; see also verse 1.

65. 1 Nephi 18:3.

66. See Alma 37:35.

67. See 1 Nephi 7:16.

68. 1 Nephi 7:21.

69. See 1 Nephi 7:17–18.

70. 1 Nephi 18:16; see also verses 11–16.

71. Mosiah 3:19.

72. See 1 Nephi 17:13.

73. Doctrine and Covenants 33:8.

74. Ether 6:17; Doctrine and Covenants 43:16.

The brother of Jared and his family were "taught from on high," which also describes how Nephi learned from God.

75. Moroni 7:48.