

# *Put Your Trust in God: The Admonitions of Alma to His Sons*

CRAIG C. CHRISTENSEN

**M**y dear brothers and sisters, Sister Christensen and I are honored to share this special day with you. We love being back on campus at BYU and appreciate the gracious way we have been received today by Elder Kim B. Clark and President Kevin J. Worthen and their wives. As we arrived early and walked across campus, we could feel the excitement in the air. We pray that this day—graduation day—will become a beloved milestone in your lives that you will look back on with a deep sense of accomplishment for many years to come.

On an occasion similar to this one, Elder M. Russell Ballard noted that the longest commencement speech on record was delivered at Harvard University in the early 1800s. It lasted more than six hours and was delivered first in Latin, then in Greek, and then in English. The shortest speech was given by Nels H. Smith, the former governor of the state of Wyoming. When called upon to speak, Governor Smith arose slowly, walked to the podium, scanned the rows and rows of graduates, and simply said, in his down-home accent, “You done real good.” He then turned around and sat down.<sup>1</sup>

Since I do not speak Latin or Greek and my desire is to be relatively brief, let me begin today by saying, “You done real good!”

Like you, we recognize that you have been living and studying for the past several years in a very unique, even sacred environment—one that, in many ways, is quite unlike anything you will find in the world. For example, you have been able to share remarkable experiences with friends and colleagues who embrace your same values. In this spiritually rich setting you have exercised faith in Jesus Christ and have incorporated into your lives the highest possible standards of righteous living. You have also kept your own commitment to excellence, devoting long days and seemingly endless nights to studying and preparing, both academically and spiritually, to enter a world that, quite frankly, needs you desperately.

---

*Craig C. Christensen, a member of the Presidency of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, delivered this commencement address on 11 August 2016.*

Your commitment to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and your willingness to form eternal families will ultimately influence everyone who comes to know you. Because of the foundation you have established while attending BYU, you are now prepared to go forth into the world and make significant contributions in your chosen fields of study, in your families, and in the lives of Heavenly Father's children everywhere.

There may be some who view this transition into the world with some trepidation. You may feel a little like Alma the Younger, who, after observing the moral state of affairs of his day, felt "grieved for the iniquity of his people, yea for the wars, and the bloodsheds, and the contentions which were among them."<sup>2</sup> Perhaps you can relate to this sorrow that Alma felt as you witness some of the events in today's world.

For me, one of the keys to finding personal peace and a sense of purpose in times like these is to study how other faithful disciples, including Alma, responded to similar circumstances. Like you, Alma did not want to accept things as he found them or simply retreat from society and wait for things to change. Yet he also did not want to overreact or take matters into his own hands. He sought for and received guidance from the Holy Ghost. Then, under direction from the Spirit, he went to work. His response was to teach and minister to others and "to stand as [a witness] of God at all times and . . . in all places."<sup>3</sup> Alma's indomitable faith in the Savior gave him confidence to do as Nephi had done—to "go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded."<sup>4</sup>

I also find it instructive that, with all that was needed in the world around him, Alma gave priority to ministering to his own family. On at least one occasion Alma's sorrow for the iniquity of his people and his desire to do something about it led him, almost instinctively, to cause "that his sons should be gathered together, that he might give unto them

every one his charge, separately, concerning the things pertaining unto righteousness."<sup>5</sup> The admonitions that Alma gave to his three sons—Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton—found in Alma 36 through 42, are some of the most powerful and touching examples of fatherly counsel found in scripture.

Now I do not know how old Alma's sons were when he gathered them together, yet I suspect they were about your same age. He indicated that they were "in [their] youth,"<sup>6</sup> and at least two of them were recently returned missionaries. I also don't know whether Alma had any daughters, although if he did, it is reasonable to think his counsel to them would have been similar to the counsel he gave his sons.

So as I pondered what I might share with you today, I felt impressed to review four of the most prominent admonitions of Alma to his sons. As I review these key principles, I pray that you will feel that your Heavenly Father is speaking directly to you, His sons and His daughters, giving you loving and essential guidance to help you prepare for whatever your futures may hold.

### **I. Put Your Trust in God**

First and foremost, Alma wanted his sons to learn to trust in the Lord. "I do know," he told Helaman, "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."<sup>7</sup> Learning to trust in the Lord, even in the midst of trials and afflictions, is the way we manifest our love for Him. It is the key to finding true happiness in this life and in the life to come.

Alma knew this from personal experience, for he had been thrown in prison, mocked, and spat upon for preaching the gospel. Notwithstanding all his experiences, Alma never lost his faith, and he wanted his sons to learn from his example. He shared with them this simple yet certain testimony: "*I have been*

supported under trials and troubles of every kind, yea, and in all manner of afflictions . . . ; yea, and I do put my trust in him, and he will still deliver me.”<sup>8</sup>

Alma’s testimony reminds me of the optimism and faith expressed by President Gordon B. Hinckley as he spoke of putting our trust in God:

*It isn’t as bad as you sometimes think it is. It all works out. Don’t worry. I say that to myself every morning. . . . Put your trust in God, and move forward with faith and confidence in the future. . . . If we will put our trust in Him, if we will pray to Him, if we will live worthy of His blessings, He will hear our prayers.*<sup>9</sup>

My dear friends, I invite you to consider how you will demonstrate your trust in God throughout your lives. What will you do to show God that you trust Him above everything else—above your own wisdom and especially above the wisdom of the world? Placing our trust in God means, as Alma taught his sons, that we do not boast in our own wisdom nor of our own strength.<sup>10</sup> Rather, we should “let all [our] doings be unto the Lord” and should “counsel with the Lord in all [our] doings.”<sup>11</sup> As you do this, you will discover that “in the strength of the Lord [you can] do all things.”<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps I should share an example from my own experience. Several years ago, when I had returned to Church headquarters after serving in Mexico, I was assigned a parking stall directly behind the space reserved for Elder Richard G. Scott. Often, as I parked my car in the morning, I noticed Elder Scott sitting in his car with his head bowed, praying one more time before he entered the office. Why? Because he trusted in the Lord. He knew he needed Heavenly Father’s help and guidance.

Elder Scott’s example has changed how I start my day. When I arrive at work, I spend a few moments in prayer—expressing my trust

in the Lord and pleading that my activities that day will be in accordance with His mind and will, that I will remember who I am and act accordingly, and that He will mercifully fill in the many gaps in which I fall short.

This daily expression has been a meaningful experience for me. Clearly my trials and challenges have not been as severe as those Alma suffered through, yet I can add my testimony to his—that God truly does support all those who put their trust in Him.

## II. Learn to Keep the Commandments of God

The second powerful admonition from Alma is found in these words: “O, remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God.”<sup>13</sup> I am interested in the fact that Alma connected learning wisdom with being obedient to the commandments of God. Besides the obvious fact that it is wise to keep the commandments, through obedience we become worthy to receive the Holy Ghost, and it is through the Holy Ghost that we are taught wisdom “from on high.”<sup>14</sup> Alma also taught that wisdom is not just for those who have years of experience; his counsel was to seek wisdom “in thy youth.”<sup>15</sup>

It has been said that we pay for our schooling but that wisdom cannot be purchased.<sup>16</sup> Wisdom comes from life’s experiences and from sacred experiences with the Holy Ghost. As you continue your lifelong effort to learn wisdom, remember these priorities established by the Lord:

*Seek not for riches but for wisdom, and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you, and then shall you be made rich. Behold, he that hath eternal life is rich.*<sup>17</sup>

In other words, you didn’t come to BYU merely to increase your earning power. You came to learn wisdom—to learn the mysteries of God—which requires much more than

secular learning; it requires that we obey the voice of the Lord and keep His commandments.

Let me hasten to say that this does not mean you shouldn't or won't be prosperous. Alma also taught his sons, "Inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land."<sup>18</sup> Remember, however, that prosperity must never take priority over obedience. We must never compromise the things we know to be true, and we must always live our lives according to the spiritual laws upon which these eternal blessings are predicated.<sup>19</sup>

Given the perilous times in which we live, in which sin is now being normalized and even celebrated, Alma teaches us to not only develop a spirit of obedience but also to develop what he called "an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity."<sup>20</sup> As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are charged to love all people—even those mired in sin—but we resist anything that would put our spiritual lives in jeopardy. In other words, our "spiritual antennae" must be high and finely tuned so that, through the Holy Ghost, we can distinguish between activities that are "virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy"<sup>21</sup> and activities that are not and know where we "should be anxiously engaged"<sup>22</sup> and when we should simply turn our backs and walk away.

### III. "Bridle All Your Passions"

A third point we learn from Alma is the admonition to "bridle all your passions."<sup>23</sup> We often view this charge as counsel associated with the law of chastity. It is interesting to note that when Alma gave this charge, he was not speaking to Corianton, his son who had fallen into sin, but to Shiblon, his steady son who was faithful and obedient. When speaking of passions, Alma was referring to *all* our passions—our intense energy, our enthusiasm, our determination, and our zeal for life.

Passion, in this sense, is a good thing. It motivates our daily efforts, helps strengthen our vision, and drives us to succeed. As the

French philosopher Denis Diderot said, "Only passions, . . . great passions, can raise the soul to great things."<sup>24</sup>

Alma himself was a very passionate person—passionate, in particular, about the gospel and certainly bold in declaring it. Then why the counsel to his son to bridle his passions? I can't help but wonder if Alma didn't see a bit of himself in his sons: intelligent, energetic young men who needed, on occasion, to be warned against letting "boldness" become "overbearance" or being "lifted up unto pride" and boasting of their own talents and abilities.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps he saw in them abundant spiritual energy that, in order to be most effective in the service of the Lord, needed to be properly controlled or channeled.

The image of a bridle is an interesting one. While horses today are used mostly for recreation, there was a time when owning a horse was essential to daily life. Humans could see early on that these powerful creatures could be quite useful in accomplishing difficult work, but they needed a way to harness or control their power. A bridle became the tool used to direct the horse's head and control its activities. It was not that people resented the horse's power or wanted to limit it in any way. To the contrary, they wanted to maximize it—to focus it, direct it, and put it to its very best use.

Can you see what Alma was trying to teach his son when he said, "Bridle all your passions"? He wasn't telling Shiblon to limit or smother his passions; he was simply explaining that Shiblon's passions needed to be harnessed or controlled. Heavenly Father wants us to be bold and passionate about important things. He wants us to love the truth, and He values youthful energy and enthusiasm. But He also wants to help us channel this energy into righteous work. He wants us to be boldly committed to doing good in the world and using our talents to accomplish His eternal purposes, rather than wasting them on things that really do not matter much.

Let me share an interesting example that comes from a talk given by Elder Paul B. Pieper at BYU–Idaho more than three years ago, long before Pokémon Go became a frenzy:

[One] *tactic the adversary employs in this generation is to channel men’s natural ambition to work and achieve into dead ends. God placed in young men the desire to compete and achieve, with the intent that they would use this ambition to become a faithful provider for a wife and family. In our youth, this ambition can be channeled into academic, athletic, or other pursuits that help to teach persistence, discipline, and work. However, Satan would subtly intercept that ambition and channel it into a virtual world of video games that eat up time and ambition. . . .*

*. . . No matter how hard you play a video game, no matter what score you get, virtual work can never bring you the satisfaction that accompanies real work.*<sup>26</sup>

I am sure you can think of other examples in which God-given gifts are hijacked by Satan to ensure that they are either diluted, rendered useless, or used in activities that have no eternal value. On the other hand, there are many causes that desperately need our interest and committed effort. Consider, for example, the many important moral and social issues facing our families, our nations, and society in general. Some of these include the role of parents and families, the sanctity of marriage, the right to worship and exercise one’s religion, the harmful effects of pornography, the best ways to care for the poor and needy, and many other important issues.

The restored gospel of Jesus Christ sheds considerable light on these issues. As men and women with testimonies of the gospel and a clear understanding of God’s plan of happiness, we can make unique and vital contributions in all of these areas. To be frank, the world desperately needs our voices—our impassioned voices—in these conversations.

Without them, the discussions almost always go in the wrong direction, and we will wake up one day wondering how things have slipped so far.

We can make a difference. But our lives, our talents, and our passions must be focused on things that really matter.

#### IV. “By Small and Simple Things Are Great Things Brought to Pass”

Finally, the fourth admonition of Alma comes from this counsel to his sons: “Behold I say unto you, that by small and simple things are great things brought to pass.”<sup>27</sup>

Several years ago, in this same setting, I shared the example of a family who lived close to a large amusement park. They would drive by the park often, and each time their young son would ask, “Daddy, can we go there? I really want to go there and play on all the rides.”

The father would try to deflect the question by simply saying, “Maybe tomorrow we can go.”

This little interchange repeated itself week after week until finally, early one Saturday morning, the boy came running into his parents’ bedroom. He jumped on the bed, startling both of them, and exclaimed with great enthusiasm, “Daddy, tomorrow is today!”<sup>28</sup>

This interesting play on words—tomorrow is today—illustrates a valuable point. Commencement ceremonies naturally point to the future, to the exciting opportunities ahead, and to everything you hope to accomplish. But to a great extent, your success in life and how you prepare for the responsibilities that will ultimately be yours depend on the accumulation of small and simple things you do each and every day. No matter what your ambitions for the future are, you achieve them step by step, one day at a time. In this sense, tomorrow truly is today.

An example of the small and simple things may be helpful. Dr. Truman G. Madsen, who

passed away several years ago, was a beloved professor here at BYU. When he and Sister Ann Madsen were newlyweds, Truman was pursuing a PhD in philosophy at Harvard University. His young bride, trying to earn enough money to pay the bills, took a job at a local bank.

One evening she returned home from work exhausted. She found Truman reading the Doctrine and Covenants instead of studying for an important test he had the next morning.

“What?” she exclaimed. “Why aren’t you studying for your classes? Why should I be working to support you in your graduate studies if you are only going to study the scriptures?”

Truman responded by sitting Ann down and quietly explaining “that the more he studied philosophy, the more he needed to study the revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith.” Truman Madsen’s counsel to students was, “Don’t study philosophy on an empty stomach.”<sup>29</sup>

How thankful we all are that Brother Madsen was able to keep that balance. Not only did he graduate with his PhD and his testimony of the gospel, but he also dedicated his life to helping others learn to strike that same balance, to learn “by study and also by faith.”<sup>30</sup> His dedication to small and simple things, such as consistently studying the scriptures, made a big difference in his life and in the lives of many others.

As you consider the miracles that occurred in Alma’s life and as you look to what you hope to accomplish in the future, please take time to plan out the small and simple things you will do each day to bring about your own mighty work. These simple acts, including your personal devotion to daily prayer and to scripture study, will contribute to your long-term happiness and your ultimate success in life. You will witness the hand of the Lord as He works His miracles in you, and you will be an active part of His effort “to bring about his great and eternal purposes.”<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

My dear graduates, there are so many more things I could share with you from Alma’s counsel. Let me simply conclude with one more line from Alma that seems to be appropriate today:

*And now, . . . I trust that I shall have great joy in you, because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God; for as you have commenced in your youth to look to the Lord your God, even so I hope that you will continue.*<sup>32</sup>

Of the many emotions you are surely feeling today, I hope that foremost is a sense of the great love Heavenly Father has for you, His spiritual children. He is proud of what you have accomplished so far, and His earnest desire is to see you continue as you have commenced “in the path which [leads] to the tree [of life].”<sup>33</sup> He has given you an abundance of blessings to help you along the way: the opportunity to pray to Him, to *talk* with Him; the gift of the Holy Ghost as a constant companion; His counsel in the words of scripture, the living prophets, and your own patriarchal blessings; temple ordinances and covenants that endow you “with power from on high”;<sup>34</sup> and, above all, the matchless gift of “his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”<sup>35</sup>

As a witness of Him, I assure you that He stands at the door, ready for you to invite Him into your lives as never before.<sup>36</sup> Take His yoke upon you. Learn of Him. And make a firm resolve today to follow Alma’s admonitions—to put your trust in Him, to keep His commandments, to bridle all your passions, and to attend to the small and simple things. As you do, you will see His miracles in your lives and find true happiness in the years ahead.

I testify that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which sponsors this university and much of your education here, is His Church and kingdom on the earth. President

Thomas S. Monson is His living prophet. Jesus Christ is our Savior and our Redeemer. His Father is our Father. Their promises to you are certain and will be realized as you continue with faith in Them. May this faith grow and direct your lives is my humble prayer, in the sacred and holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### Notes

1. See M. Russell Ballard, "Commencement Remarks," Brigham Young University–Idaho, 6 April 2012, [www2.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Graduation/2012\\_04\\_06\\_Ballard.htm](http://www2.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Graduation/2012_04_06_Ballard.htm).
2. Alma 35:15; see also Alma 4:15; 8:14; 31:1–2, 30.
3. Mosiah 18:9.
4. 1 Nephi 3:7.
5. Alma 35:16.
6. Alma 36:3; see also Alma 37:35; 39:10.
7. Alma 36:3; see also Alma 38:5.
8. Alma 36:27; emphasis added.
9. Gordon B. Hinckley, Jordan Utah South regional conference, priesthood session, 1 March 1997; quoted in "Excerpts from Addresses of President Gordon B. Hinckley," Latter-Day Counsel, *Ensign*, October 2000.
10. See Alma 38:11.
11. Alma 37:36–37.
12. Alma 20:4.
13. Alma 37:35.
14. D&C 43:16.
15. Alma 36:3; see also Alma 37:35; 39:10.
16. From Lynn G. Robbins, "Knowledge vs. Wisdom," LDS Business College commencement address, 15 April 2016; see Marianne Holman Prescott, "'Knowledge vs. Wisdom': Elder Robbins Speaks on Developing a Christlike Character," *Church News*, 28 April 2016, [lds.org/church/news/knowledge-vs-wisdom-elder-robbins-speaks-on-developing-a-christlike-character?lang=eng](http://lds.org/church/news/knowledge-vs-wisdom-elder-robbins-speaks-on-developing-a-christlike-character?lang=eng); see also Job 28 heading.
17. D&C 6:7; see also D&C 11:7.
18. Alma 36:1.
19. See D&C 130:20–21.
20. Alma 37:32; see also verse 33.
21. Articles of Faith 1:13.
22. D&C 58:27.
23. Alma 38:12.
24. Denis Diderot, *Pensées Philosophiques* (La Haye: Aux dépens de la Compagnie, 1746), no. 1 (page 3); see translation in Otis Fellows, *Diderot* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 39.
25. Alma 38:11, 12.
26. Paul B. Pieper, "The Realities of Mortality," Brigham Young University–Idaho devotional address, 19 February 2013, [www2.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2013\\_02\\_19\\_Pieper.htm](http://www2.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2013_02_19_Pieper.htm).
27. Alma 37:6.
28. Craig C. Christensen, "Tomorrow Is Today," BYU commencement address, 11 August 2011.
29. Barnard N. Madsen, *The Truman G. Madsen Story: A Life of Study and Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 3–4.
30. D&C 88:118.
31. Alma 37:7.
32. Alma 38:2.
33. 1 Nephi 8:22.
34. D&C 95:8.
35. John 3:16.
36. See Revelation 3:20.