

A Lesson from the Book of Mormon

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I love the Book of Mormon. It has wonderful stories for children of all ages, but more importantly it teaches timeless lessons, which are often retold in Primary songs.

For example, a great lesson can be found in the song about the army of Helaman. We sing: “We are as the army of Helaman. We have been taught in our youth.”¹ There are many of us who also feel like “we have been born, as Nephi of old, to goodly parents.”²

My message today is for you first-generation members who may have been born to goodly parents and yet were not taught the gospel in your homes. Instead of being like the army of Helaman, who “had been taught by

their mothers [that] God would deliver them” (Alma 56:47), you may be like their parents, the people of Ammon, who grew up as nonbelievers.

It may be helpful to review the story about the people of Ammon. They were Lamanites who had been taught the gospel by Ammon, Aaron, and others (see Alma 23:1–4). When they accepted the gospel, these Lamanites were called the Anti-Nephi-Lehies and later called the people of Ammon (see Alma 23:16–17; 27:23–26). The sons of these people of Ammon were the army of Helaman, who helped fight the nonconverted Lamanites (see Alma 56:3–6).

So the strength of the army of Helaman really began with their parents, who were the people of Ammon. They were the ones who first learned the gospel from the scriptures. They were the ones who learned about the power of prayer. And they were the ones who first made and kept covenants with the Lord. And just as it began with them, it begins with you. As first-generation members, you are the ones who begin the cycle of teaching and strengthening the next generation.

Scriptures

Aaron, who was a great missionary, used the scriptures to teach the

Lamanite king and the people of Ammon about faith and repentance and about Jesus Christ and the plan of happiness (see Alma 22:12–14; 23:4–5). Today, reading and studying the scriptures continues to build our faith, helps us resist temptation, and allows us to grow closer to Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

However, reading scriptures can present a challenge for everyone. President Boyd K. Packer shares his first attempts as a teenager at reading the Book of Mormon. He says: “I opened it and read, ‘I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents’ (1 Nephi 1:1). . . . It was interesting, and I could follow it until I got over to the Isaiah chapters. . . . So a few months later I decided to try again to read the Book of Mormon. I read, ‘I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents,’ but every time I’d hit the barrier of those Isaiah chapters. . . . Finally I decided I was even going to read them.”³

And of course President Packer did read them. Persistence is the key. With every reading of the scriptures, unfamiliar words will take on meaning. You can read about heroes and great acts of courage. You can learn of the tender mercies of the Lord. And above all, you can feel the love of God and know that Jesus Christ is our Savior.

Prayer

Prayer is another means to build faith. When the Lamanite king wanted to know what he should do in order to receive the joy of the gospel, he prayed to the Lord (see Alma 22:16–17). We too are promised that if we ask, it shall be given us.

Stanley was a 19-year-old investigator in Hong Kong. He was excited about the gospel and wanted to be baptized until his friends criticized the Church. He met with the missionaries. They testified that God cared enough about him to answer his prayer. They invited him to kneel and ask Heavenly Father if the teachings

were true. First one companion and then the other offered a short prayer. Then Stanley prayed. When he finished his humble prayer, they asked him, “Stanley, how do you feel?” He slowly raised his head and in almost a whisper replied, “Baptism, baptism.”⁴

Covenants

Finally, making and keeping covenants also increases faith. The people of Ammon covenanted “that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives” (Alma 24:18).

We covenant when we are baptized and take upon us the name of Christ. We are reminded of those covenants when we partake of the sacrament. And when we keep those covenants, we can have the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost. It is the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, who teaches us “all things” (John 14:26).

A sister in Mexico City was 16 years old when the missionaries came to her door. She says that as they taught with the Spirit, “it seemed like they had taken the bandages off my eyes and that the Lord was clearing my understanding. . . . The word of God and my prayers strengthened [me] to overcome my next trial, to face my father. When I met rejection from my family because of my baptism, the Spirit of the Lord strengthened me by whispering: ‘Keep on. Go on. Some of your relatives will become members of the Church.’”⁵

The scriptures, prayer, and making and keeping covenants have not only helped the people of Ammon but also first-generation members everywhere—including me. You see, while I was born of goodly parents, I was not taught the gospel at home. However, my parents did teach me moral values and ethical conduct. I remember my nonmember father helping me write the first talk I gave at church. The assigned topic was



honesty, and instead of quoting the 13th article of faith, we used an example of a man whose nickname was Honest Abe.

It was left to Primary teachers, Young Women leaders, and priesthood leaders to provide me with gospel instruction. When I was seven years old, my junior Sunday School teacher taught us about prayer, and I wanted to pray. She taught us about tithing, and I wanted to pay tithing. She taught us about fasting, and, well, I was only seven years old, so I didn’t want to fast. But when she taught us about baptism, I wanted to be baptized. I am grateful for my goodly parents who supported me in my decision and who later also became members of the Church.

It Begins with Us

The people of Ammon lived the gospel, and “they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end” (Alma 27:27). It began with them. And it begins with us. As first-generation members who have gained testimonies,

we now have a responsibility to teach the children of today. We must teach them in our homes and in our classes. We must teach them the word of God from the scriptures. We must teach them the power of prayer, and we must teach them the blessings that come from making and keeping covenants. And if we teach them, they will be able to say:

*We are as the army of Helaman.
We have been taught in our youth.
And we will be the Lord’s
missionaries
To bring the world his truth.*⁶

In the name of Jesus Christ,
amen. ■

NOTES

1. “We’ll Bring the World His Truth,” *Children’s Songbook*, 172–73.
2. *Children’s Songbook*, 172–73.
3. “Principles of Teaching and Learning,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Feb. 2007; in *Liabona*, June 2007, 53; *Ensign*, June 2007, 85.
4. Personal correspondence.
5. Personal correspondence.
6. *Children’s Songbook*, 172–73.