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## THE BOOK OF MORMON: “A Standard unto My People”

**Y**ears ago, in northeastern Spain, four elders held an open house in a small rented hall that served as a chapel for their branch.

They posted signs outside to attract anyone interested. A young man saw the signs and entered the chapel but had no interest in staying.

He left and wasn't more than half a block away when two elders ran after him with a copy of the Book of Mormon. The young man accepted the gift, but at home, he placed it on the dining room table, never to touch it again.

### **A Powerful Impact**

However, when the young man's 15-year-old brother, Luis, returned home from school, he noticed the book, picked it up, and began to read.

Luis Rodriguez soon found the missionaries, studied the gospel, gained a witness of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, and became a true convert.

Since then, he has served a full-time mission, married in the Bern Switzerland Temple, served in a variety of Church callings, and seen his own children serve missions and marry in the Madrid Spain Temple. Recently he began his service as mission president, along with his wife, Consuelo, in the Bolivia Santa Cruz North Mission. There they will share their testimony and the role of the Book of Mormon in President Rodriguez's conversion.

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priority in our lives.*

“Thanks to the Book of Mormon,” President Rodriguez told me, “not only was I baptized, but so were my two sisters, as well as a friend of my sister, whose son served in the London South Mission. The lives of the people I taught on my mission were changed, as well as the people baptized by my children on their missions. Last year my 91-year-old mother was baptized, and this year I participated in the sealing of my mother to my deceased father. Soon after, I was sealed with two of my siblings to my parents. It is impossible to know the number of lives that have been influenced since those missionaries gave my brother the Book of Mormon.”

The lasting influence of the Book of Mormon on the Rodriguez family is just one example of the powerful impact this sacred work of scripture has on all who will sincerely study its pages.

### **The Significance of the Book of Mormon**

The premortal Savior told Nephi that “the words of your seed [will] proceed forth out of my mouth unto your seed; and my words shall hiss forth unto the ends of the earth, for a standard unto my people” (2 Nephi 29:2). The Lord made it clear that His words, as shared by Nephi and his descendants, would come forth in our day as a standard for the Lord’s people to live by. The ancient prophets who authored the Book of Mormon knew of us and that we would have access to this sacred record. Moroni said: “Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35).

In September 1823, the ancient prophet Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith. Of all the glorious truths that needed to be revealed as part of the “restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21), Moroni began his message by declaring that “there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent” and “that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it” (Joseph Smith—History 1:34).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was officially organized on April 6, 1830, before most of the revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants had been received<sup>1</sup> but not before the publication of the Book of Mormon, which became available less than two weeks before the organization of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, “The Book of Mormon is an incomparable treasure and the instrument of conversion that the Lord has designed and provided for our dispensation.”<sup>3</sup> Knowing it is the keystone of our religion, we should give serious thought to how we study the Book of Mormon. Elder Christofferson suggests:

- “Study in a thoughtful, meditative fashion—pondering, praying, and perhaps making notes as we read. This puts us in a condition to receive added light and understanding.”
- “Generally it is best to focus on devoting adequate time each day to studying the book as opposed to reading some fixed number of verses or pages per day.”
- “Study with these questions in mind: ‘Why was this included? How does this apply today and to me?’”<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, it is not how many times we read the Book of Mormon that is important but how we apply what we’ve studied in our pursuit to become more like our Savior. Since becoming is a lifelong challenge, our study of the Book of Mormon must be a lifelong pursuit.

### **Principles and Pruning**

In my recent study of the Book of Mormon, a few principles have stood out to me.

#### **1. *The principle of opposition***

At one point in the allegory of the tame and wild olive trees, the Lord of the vineyard says to the servant, “And as they begin to grow ye shall clear away the branches which bring forth bitter fruit, according to the strength of the good and the size thereof; and ye shall not clear away the bad thereof all at once, lest the roots thereof should be too



*From the allegory of the olive trees, we learn that opposition strengthens us as we grow.*

strong for the graft, and the graft thereof shall perish, and I lose the trees of my vineyard” (Jacob 5:65).

I know very little about pruning an olive tree. But I would have assumed that the best thing to do would be to cut off all the branches producing bitter fruit, leaving only the branches that produce good fruit.

As I read, however, I made these notes in my study journal: “I’d never noticed the principle of opposition in this allegory before, but according to Zenos and Jacob, doing it my way would cause the roots to gain too much strength and would ruin the tree! We need opposition to grow, to be able to choose. That is how we will be strengthened.”

Challenges and trials are part of life, allowed by a wise Father in Heaven. No one is immune. Opposition may come because of the choices others make, as a consequence of our own behavior, or simply because challenges are part of our mortal experience.

Trials we face help us develop the qualities and attributes required to return to the presence of our Father in Heaven. We find a clear example of this principle in the challenges faced by the Jaredites.

Once they entered the barges they had built for their journey across the ocean, “the Lord God caused that there should be a furious wind blow upon the face of the waters, towards the promised land; and thus they were tossed upon the waves of the sea before the wind.

“And it came to pass that they were many times buried in the depths of the sea, because of the mountain waves which broke upon them, and also the great and terrible tempests which were caused by the fierceness of the wind.

“And thus they were driven forth, three hundred and forty and four days upon the water.

“And they did land upon the shore of the promised land . . . and did shed tears of joy before the Lord, because of the multitude of his tender mercies over them” (Ether 6:5–6, 11–12).

Like the Jaredites, the key to our success is not found in avoiding opposition but in facing it with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Atonement. In the New Testament, the Savior said: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

## **2. The principle of preparation**

Chapters 36–42 of Alma are filled with remarkable doctrinal instruction. However, in the first verses of chapter 43, Mormon writes:

“We shall say no more concerning their preaching. . . .

“And now I return to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites” (Alma 43:2–3).



***“Remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.”***

Some may find the switch away from commentary regarding the preaching of truth, prophecy, and revelation to be a bit odd. After all, these are principles you would want to share with future readers of the record.

However, as I read deeper into these chapters, it became clear to me that today we face many of the same issues the Nephites faced. We are in a war that is just as real and even more potentially devastating—a battle for the souls of men and women. We read the Book of Mormon not to become fearful but to find principles we can apply. Search and you will find your own lessons to apply in your individual battles, which are unique to your circumstances.

I have learned that ongoing preparation is a key to success. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said: “As the adversary increases the intensity and the sophistication of his attacks, we must increase in spiritual strength and power. What has been effective for us in the past will not be effective in the future. Thus, if you and I simply stay the same spiritually, we are destined to fail.”<sup>5</sup> If we are not constantly strengthening ourselves spiritually, we are at risk. “Wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion!” (2 Nephi 28:24). We

want to be at peace but not at ease, and we are at peace when we are prepared.

In these war chapters we read about Captain Moroni, leader of the Nephite armies, who prepared his people even during a time of peace “to be faithful unto the Lord their God.

“Yea, he had been strengthening the armies of the Nephites. . . .

“And in their weakest fortifications he did place the greater number of men” (Alma 48:7–9).

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we are taught to prepare ourselves both temporally and spiritually—to be baptized, receive the priesthood, serve a mission as appropriate, and attend the temple. We are counseled to prepare with savings and food storage.

We can compare our preparation to Moroni’s preparation. Thanks to his constant effort, “the Nephites [were] prepared to destroy all such as should attempt . . . to enter the fort” (Alma 49:19), and “thus the Nephites had all power over their enemies” (Alma 49:23).

Spiritual and temporal preparation is vital to our survival in the war for our souls.

### 3. *The principle of remembering*

We celebrate anniversaries, study history, and designate holidays to commemorate significant events. We do these things to help us remember. I believe, of all that the Book of Mormon is meant to accomplish, helping us to remember is high on the list. And of all we are meant to remember, one fact stands alone in its significance, that Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer of the world.

Another Book of Mormon account teaches the power of remembering. After the Anti-Nephi-Lehies were converted to the Lord, they said they would give up their lives “rather than shed the blood of their brethren” (Alma 24:18). We see the source of their faith when we read:

“Yea, and they did keep the law of Moses . . . [but] they did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses was a type of his coming, and believing that they must keep those outward performances until the time that he should be revealed unto them.

“Now they did not suppose that salvation came by the law of Moses; but the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ” (Alma 25:15–16).

Their obedience included participation in ordinances and rites that served as a continuous reminder of the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ and of what they knew and believed. Their situation and circumstances, though separated from us by more than 2,000 years, are remarkably like our own. We receive similar reminders that keep our hearts and minds focused on Jesus Christ as we:

- Read and study the scriptures, which testify of Jesus Christ.
- Attend the temple, where Jesus Christ is continually manifest.
- Pray and humbly acknowledge the Savior’s majesty and mercy, which brings the influence of the Spirit.
- Keep the Sabbath day holy, which enables us to strengthen our faith in Heavenly Father and in Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice.
- Partake of the sacrament, which renews our commitment to “always remember him” (Moroni 4:3).

Our faith is strengthened as we do these things—our equivalent today of what the Anti-Nephi-Lehies experienced while keeping the law of Moses.

In another Book of Mormon scripture, which reminds us six times to “remember,” Helaman counsels his sons:

“O remember, remember . . . ; yea, remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world. . . .

“ . . . 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 5:9, 12).

### **A Prophetic Promise**

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) shared this promise with those who study the Book of Mormon: “There will come into your lives and into your homes an added measure of the Spirit of the Lord, a strengthened resolution to walk in obedience to His commandments, and a stronger testimony of the living reality of the Son of God.”<sup>6</sup>

My testimony of the Book of Mormon, gained as a young man before serving as a full-time missionary, has sustained me in times of trial and has been my anchor when I have confronted doubts or concerns.

Whether we are young or old, whether our testimony is strong or just beginning to grow, an ongoing study of the Book of Mormon should remain a priority in our lives. I testify that it is, indeed, a standard for our day. ■

*From a regional stake conference broadcast address given at the Conference Center on September 11, 2016.*

### **NOTES**

1. See “Chronological Order of Contents” in the Doctrine and Covenants.
2. See “Book of Mormon Historic Publication Site,” [history.lds.org](http://history.lds.org).
3. D. Todd Christofferson, “How to Study the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2011, 30.
4. D. Todd Christofferson, “How to Study the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2011, 30, 28.
5. David A. Bednar, General Authority training, Mar. 31, 2005.
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, “A Testimony Vibrant and True,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2005, 6.