



Change

AND THE VIRTUE OF THE WORD

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Of the Seventy

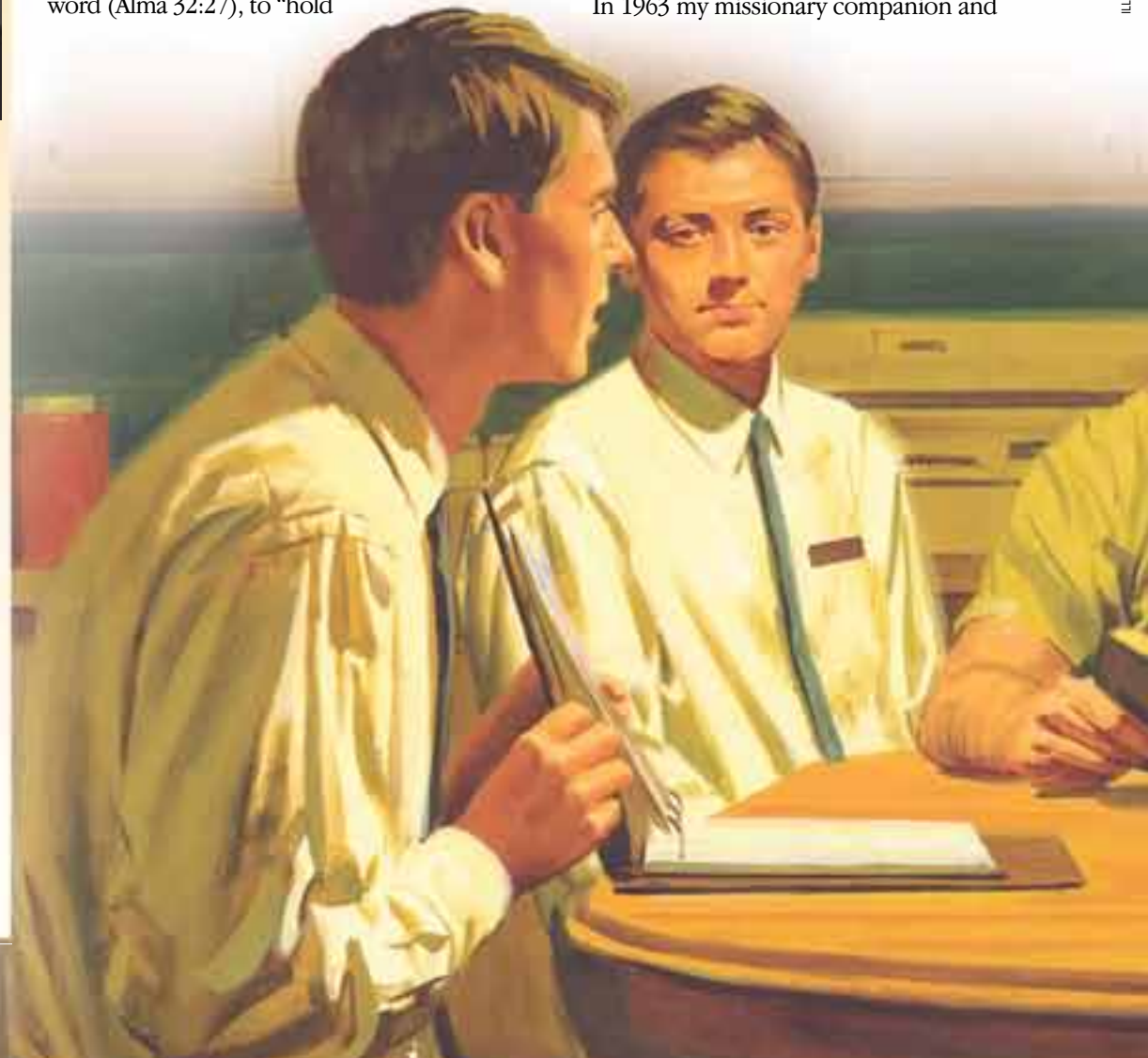
Because of “the power of the word of God” (2 Nephi 1:26), the scriptures teach us to “feast upon the words of Christ” (2 Nephi 32:3), to “experiment” on the word (Alma 32:27), to “hold

fast unto” the word (1 Nephi 15:24), and to “live by . . . every word of God” (Luke 4:4). As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we, like Jacob in the Book of Mormon, are to “teach . . . the word of God with all diligence” (Jacob 1:19).

In 1963 my missionary companion and



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I taught a young family of five in Albany, Georgia. After the third or fourth discussion, the wife told us that since we had started teaching them, she and her husband were closer and he was treating her better than at any other time in their marriage. As we concluded the next discussion, the husband shared an experience.

“Today the people I work with wanted to know what has happened to me,” he related. “When I asked them what they meant, they said, ‘You don’t use the same language you used to use when you get angry, and you’re more patient. You seem happier.’”

The Book of Mormon helps us understand what Alma calls “the virtue of the word” and its power to help us change. When apostate practices had crept into the religious ceremonies of the Zoramites, they needed correction. “And now, as the preaching of the word had a great

tendency to lead the people to do that which was just—yea, it had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else, which had happened unto them—therefore Alma thought it was expedient that they should try the virtue of the word of God” (Alma 31:5).

The doctrine of the restored gospel reminds us of the same principle. President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, has taught: “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.”¹

As a bishop a number of years ago, I witnessed a dramatic change as the virtue of the word of God came into the life of a young man. Sometime during his early teens he had drifted from the Church. A friend from high school,



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-serving a mission thousands of miles away, wrote to his former classmate, bore testimony of the power and influence of the gospel in his life, shared some missionary experiences, and encouraged his friend to reclaim the peace and joy of the gospel. That testimony, reinforced by the Spirit and good memories of living the gospel when he was young, touched the young man. Another letter from his friend served as a second witness. Within a short time the young man was in his bishop's office. He was eager to develop the traits that his friend had developed and to follow him into the mission field.

The family we taught in the mission field and the young man who had strayed each experienced the virtue of the word. In individual ways they felt what the father of King Lamoni felt when he prayed, "O God, Aaron hath told me that there is a God; and if there is a God, and if thou art God, wilt thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee" (Alma 22:18).

Nephi explained that the word, or the message of the gospel, goes directly to the heart: "When a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men" (2 Nephi 33:1).

When Alma spoke of going to preach to the Zoramites, he mentioned the "powerful effect" of the word and concluded by saying that he and his brethren would "try the virtue of the word" (Alma 31:5). The strength and power of the word of the gospel is demonstrated by the virtues it helps us develop. In the lives of the people I've mentioned, the influence of the word was evident in their humility, submissiveness, gentleness, and willingness to act on the things they had been



taught. The virtues of change came to the father as he developed a greater love and devotion for his wife and family and as he disciplined his tongue. The young man manifested the virtues of change by his desire to repent and serve a mission.

Many years of Church service have taught me that no person has the power to change another. Change comes from within as we are moved upon by the Holy Ghost. Others may motivate us to change, but the determination to change is generated by personal desire as we yield "to the enticings of the Holy Spirit" (Mosiah 3:19).

Change does not always come dramatically. For most of us, progress comes "line upon line" (D&C 98:12) in a process that seems almost imperceptible. My mother made the following observation years ago: "You haven't always been the way you are," she told me. "I like what you have become."

The virtue and power of the word can have a profound influence on each of us as we study, pray, exercise faith, repent, and work "to do that which [is] just" (Alma 31:5). ■

NOTE

1. "Do Not Fear," *Liabona and Ensign*, May 2004, 79.