

When Loved Ones Leave the Church

By Merrilee Browne Boyack

One of the things I have always found curious about the Book of Mormon is the repeated descriptions of families with children who struggle with their faith. It's remarkable. Here are prophets who are writing about their own children who are struggling with sin or a crisis of faith. They could have left out those parts. But instead they described them for us.

Many of us will experience having a child, other family member, or dear friend reject or become indifferent to the gospel of Jesus Christ. My husband and I have a son who does not believe in our faith. It can be difficult to know what to do. But these Book of Mormon examples can help us find inspiration for our own families.

1. Never give up

I had a young plumber come to my home once. He was a nice young man covered in tattoos. He said he had come back to full activity in the Church and was about to be sealed in the temple. I asked him, "What brought you back?" He related that his mother had sent him an article by Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and that he actually read it and was converted back to his faith.

I learned a great lesson from that: we should never give up on our loved ones.

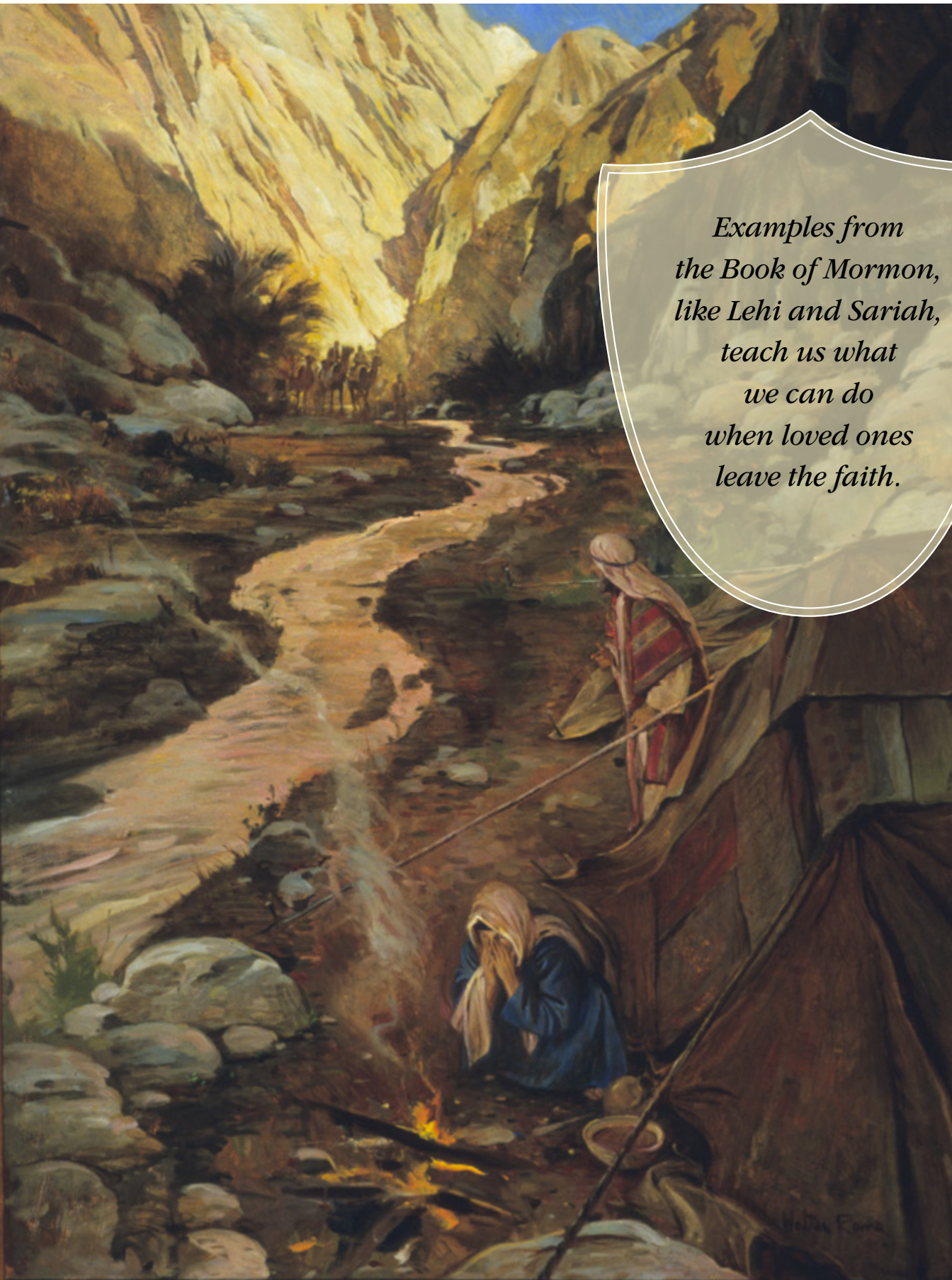
Lehi was a great example of this principle. He never stopped loving his children, and he never gave up hoping and praying that all of them would be faithful. Even as he was facing death, he taught his children it wasn't too late: "Awake, my sons; put on the armor of righteousness. Shake off the chains with which ye are bound, and come forth out of obscurity, and arise from the dust" (2 Nephi 1:23).

This can be a challenge. It is hard to continually hope, love, and encourage our loved ones when we face hostility or rejection. But Lehi showed that it is possible to never give up on our love for our loved ones or on our faith in Christ.

2. Continuously pray for miracles

Every parent of a child who has chosen another path hopes for a story similar to Alma's. Again, it is remarkable that this story is shared in great, painful detail.

Alma the Elder had been a wicked man when he was a priest of the corrupt King Noah. But he "repented of his sins and iniquities" (Mosiah 18:1) and went on to become the high priest of



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the Church in Zarahemla and a prophet of God.

Imagine how painful it was for him to have his son become a serious enemy to the Church. Alma was deeply concerned both for his son and for the members of the Church who were being led away. So, in addition to whatever else he had tried, he turned to mighty prayer to seek help for his son and others.

And a miracle came. An angel appeared to his son.

Many of us have turned to prayer hoping to receive guidance and miracles on behalf of those we love. Those prayers can be deep and anguished in the dark of the night or extend day after day, year after year, as we beg the Lord for help.

These prayers *will* be answered, according to the Lord's will and timing. He may not send an angel, and He will never remove someone's agency, but it doesn't mean He won't work miracles—whether small or large. The Lord delights to answer our prayers on behalf of those we love.

When Jesus came to the Americas, He taught, "Pray in your families unto the Father, always in my name, that your wives and your children may be blessed" (3 Nephi 18:21).

We must continue to pray (and listen to and act on the promptings we receive) and have faith that those prayers are heard and answered.

3. Ask others to help

Alma did not seek for blessings from God alone. He asked others to help.

When the angel appeared unto Alma the Younger, he said, "Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of *his people*, and also the

prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father" (Mosiah 27:14; emphasis added).

Then when Alma heard all that had happened to his son, he rejoiced "and *he caused that a multitude should be gathered together* that they might witness what the Lord had done for his son. . . .

"And *he caused that the priests should assemble themselves together*; and they began to fast, and to pray to the Lord their God" (Mosiah 27:21–22; emphasis added).

Alma shared his concerns about his son with other members of the Church, and they joined their faith and prayers with his. He involved the leaders of the Church in praying and fasting. He asked his friends and neighbors and fellow Church members to pray and then invited them to become part of the process of the miraculous conversion of his son.

In contrast, we often suffer in silence. We are reluctant to talk about the struggles of our children or family members. We sometimes blame ourselves and wonder what we could have done better or differently.

Alma teaches us the importance of asking others for help.

Sometimes a fellow ward member may be the best one to help our child. Sometimes having the entire extended family fast and pray can

In asking others to fast and pray, Alma invited them to become part of the miraculous conversion of his son.



bring power to help the family know what steps to take to help. Perhaps a dear friend can counsel us with just what we need to hear.

As we ask others to assist us, we can activate all kinds of efforts that can bless those we love. We should humbly and prayerfully seek this help.

4. Teach truth with clarity and fearlessness

When Alma the Younger had older children of his own, he didn't let fear or embarrassment keep him from sharing with each of them some of the details of his own mistakes and the process he went through to repent (see Alma 36:17–20).

When his son Corianton went after a local harlot (see Alma 39), Alma did not shy away from teaching him with great clarity: “Now my son, I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God” (Alma 39:9).

It could not have been easy for Alma to be so forthright in such a painful situation. Just as he had brought pain and sorrow to his father, his son was now doing the same. But Alma was clear with each of his sons because he loved them and was concerned about their eternal state.

Sometimes we are fearful and reluctant to discuss doctrine and truth with our loved ones. We worry that we might offend them or that they will reject us. And this may occur.

But the Book of Mormon teaches us repeatedly of the critical importance of continually testifying of truth to those who struggle with sin or with their faith. Lehi, Jacob, Alma the Elder, Alma the Younger, and more taught



their children with absolute faith in God and were fearless in their testimonies.

Some had their children return to faith. Others did not. But each one continued to teach and testify with faith not fear.

5. Trust God to save our loved ones

The Book of Mormon ends with the tender story of Mormon and his beloved son, Moroni. Moroni included letters he received from his father that reveal the sweet relationship between father and son.

Mormon wrote, “My son, I recommend thee unto God, and I trust in Christ that thou wilt be saved; and I pray unto God that he will spare thy life, to witness the return of his people unto him, or their utter destruction; for I know that they must perish except they repent and return unto him” (Moroni 9:22).

This reveals a great principle: we must trust God to save our loved ones.

My own mother fasted and prayed for years and years that her children would be faithful. One night she prayed with heartbroken tears, begging the Lord to save her loved ones. Finally, she grew tired and was quiet. It was then that the Spirit whispered gently to her, “Be still and know that I am God” (Doctrine Covenants 101:16).

Mother came to a great realization in that moment. She had not been trusting God. She had been so afraid, so desperate, that she had not had faith that God knew her children well and loved them dearly and that He will save them if they will allow it. This understanding allowed her to focus on being their mom and lay the burden of “saving” at the Savior’s feet where it belonged.

We must seek the peace that comes from trusting God and having faith in His ability to rescue our loved ones. He won’t force them to choose Him and neither can we. But we can rest assured that He knows exactly what they need if they will accept His help. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.