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EXPERIENCING a Change of Heart



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Rosemary, our firstborn child, was a new pretty baby when my mother visited us from her village in central Zimbabwe. As brand-new parents, my wife, Naume, and I were so excited for my mother's visit. We were eager to learn everything we needed to know about raising a child.

Upon arriving, my mother brought out a round cloth necklace. Wrapped in the cloth, she explained, was a magical object. She held out the necklace to Naume to put on Rosemary's neck. Sensing Naume's hesitation, my mother immediately said: "From an early age my mother and maternal grandmother gave me this magical object, which has protected me and all my children, including your husband. This amulet will protect your daughter from diseases and from all sorts of spells that might befall her, and she will overcome any difficult situation in life. She will need to wear this until she is five years old."

At that time I was serving as branch president, and I immediately thought, "What will the members of my branch think when they see this 'magical' necklace on our baby's neck?" Then I thought, "Maybe we could cover it so that it will not be so visible." I looked at Naume; her expression told me that we should not accept this gift. I asked my mother if she could make a small, thin necklace, one that might not be so visible. She responded that it was not possible and that the magical object worked best in the format she had prepared it.

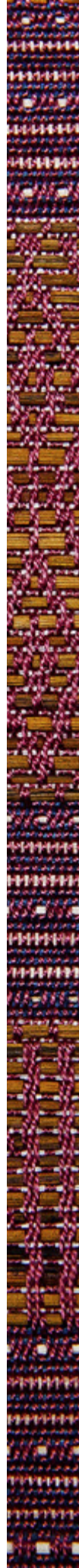
Again, Naume gave me a look that clearly expressed her disapproval. I turned to my mother and explained

that as a branch president in our local congregation, I would not be comfortable placing the necklace on our child. My mother replied with a warning: she told us that without the necklace our baby would die.

A Moment of Panicked Crisis

A few weeks after this incident, our little Rosemary fell very ill. We did not have money to take her to the doctor. It was at night, and at that moment I started thinking about what my mother had said in her warning. I began wishing I had accepted the necklace. I would have taken it and put it on Rosemary's neck. At this moment of panic, I heard a still, small voice urging me to exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I immediately got dressed in my Sunday best. I took our baby in my arms and pronounced a priesthood blessing. I felt peace and comfort, and I sensed that my wife felt the same way. Almost immediately both Naume and little Rosemary fell into a peaceful sleep. Our daughter Rosemary was healed. In the proceeding days she slowly recovered and regained her full health. What a miracle we witnessed! The Lord in His tender mercies reached out to me and strengthened my faith in Him.

I was grateful but also a little ashamed. Here I was, a returned missionary serving as a branch president, but I was more concerned about what people would say rather than believing in God (see Mosiah 4:9). Yes, even my mother, whom I love and admire so much, could not comprehend all things. I needed to be something more than just a returned missionary;



something more than a branch president; I needed to change—to experience what Alma experienced.

A Moment of Mighty Change

Alma, priest of wicked King Noah, likely examined himself closely when the prophet Abinadi asked this searching question: “Ye have not applied your hearts to understanding; therefore, ye have not been wise. Therefore, what teach ye this people?” (Mosiah 12:27). Just like Alma, I needed to have a “mighty change wrought in [my] heart” (Alma 5:12).

As a priest in King Noah’s court, Alma was accustomed to a life of privilege. He received support for his living through the people’s taxes. He enjoyed a position of power and prominence. He was one of those who “were lifted up in the pride of their hearts” (Mosiah 11:5). Yet when Alma learned about the Savior’s coming into the world—of His teachings, suffering, death, and Resurrection and that Jesus Christ is “the light and the life of the world; yea, a light that is endless, that can never be darkened; yea, and also a life which is endless, that there can be no more death” (Mosiah 16:9)—he was ready to change. He was even ready to die if necessary.

Surrounded by opposition and life-threatening dangers, Alma courageously pleaded with King Noah to let Abinadi depart in peace. Alma’s actions came from his heart; he had felt the love of the Savior extended to him through the Lord’s prophet Abinadi.

When my mother offered me a necklace of protection to put on my baby’s neck, I based my concern on outward appearance.

I was worried about what the members of our branch would think of me. Apparently, I had not yet fully experienced that “mighty change of heart.” I have since come to realize that our success and happiness is based on how fully we are willing to take the gospel into our hearts. In order for us to find true happiness, joy, and peace, “the pure gospel of Jesus Christ must go down into [our] hearts . . . by the power of the Holy Ghost.”¹

An Opportunity to Testify

With this kind of change, looking up to the Savior in all things and in all places enables us to reach out to others. Alma became a mighty missionary, reaching out to so many and organizing the Church of Christ among his people who fled from King Noah.

Can you see how I missed an opportunity to share the gospel with my mother when she offered us that magical object, which she believed had always protected her and her children? I could have been an instrument in the hands of the Lord—just like Alma—who preached the gospel of Jesus Christ and “changed their

I took our baby in my arms and pronounced a priesthood blessing.



CONTINUING CONVERSION

“We need to experience a continuing conversion by increasing our faith in Jesus Christ and our faithfulness to His gospel throughout our lives—not just once but regularly.”

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Stay in the Boat and Hold On!” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 90.





Alma courageously pleaded with King Noah to let Abinadi depart in peace.

hearts; yea, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God” (Alma 5:7).

As I reflect on that occasion with my mother, I wonder what would have happened had I responded more like Alma. My mother may have been awakened unto God, and her change could have had a positive impact upon my siblings. This change could then have had a great impact in the lives of my siblings’ children and on to their posterity.

Alma’s mighty change was felt not only by those whom he taught and to whom he testified but also by his children and his posterity. His son, Alma, when preaching to the people in and around the land of Zarahemla, reminded them of his father’s testimony of the Savior Jesus Christ:

“Behold, I can tell you—did not my father Alma believe in the words which were delivered by the mouth of Abinadi? . . .

“And according to his faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart” (Alma 5:11–12).

For a young person like Alma, this mighty change of heart, which began through the invitation by Abinadi to apply one’s heart to understanding the word of God, was the key to his happiness and success in reaching out to others: “And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved” (Alma 5:13).

Make an Ongoing Change

Some young people today are caught between choosing what is right in the sight of God or pleasing their parents or guardians, who may not share the same feelings they have about the truthfulness of the gospel. When faced with such a choice, ask yourself, “Does this decision help me to feel that my ‘works have

been the works of righteousness’ (Alma 5:16), and does it still make me feel ‘to sing the song of redeeming love?’” (Alma 5:26).

While we should all love and admire our parents, we need to know that the choices we make will have a direct impact upon our children and our posterity. To some of us it may be necessary to move away from our comfort zones, as did Alma, who fled from the servants of King Noah and taught the gospel in very difficult circumstances. He brought about change not only in his family but also in others. To experience a change of heart, it is important that we think of others and “join in fasting and mighty prayer in behalf of the welfare of the souls of those who [know] not God” (Alma 6:6).

What if our baby Rosemary had not survived her illness—even after the priesthood blessing I pronounced upon her? The Lord’s admonition is a great strength to me: “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39).

We find joy in the consistent effort of experiencing a change of heart as we embrace the Atonement of Jesus Christ in our lives. I am grateful for this knowledge, and I know in my heart that our Savior went forth, “suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” (Alma 7:11). I know that there is real safety and protection in looking to the Lord and following His counsel. ■

NOTE

1. Henry B. Eyring, “We Must Raise Our Sights,” *Ensign*, Sept. 2004, 16.