

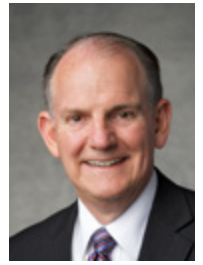


Alma 8-12
JUNE 8-14

MEMBERS AND MISSIONARIES



WORKING TOGETHER



By Elder
James B. Martino
Of the Seventy

Our friends, the Ragsdales, had just joined the Church. They began to invite my parents, who were not members, to hear the missionary discussions, come to church, and join in activities. This continued for more than two years. My parents always said they were not interested.

Finally my mother told my dad, “We are going to have to say yes, because they are not going to stop inviting us.” So Mom and Dad did finally go to a Church meeting. They felt the Spirit, became interested, learned more, and soon were baptized.

I asked Pat Ragsdale why they kept inviting my parents, even though my parents’ answer was negative. She shook her finger at me and said, “We did not invite your parents because it was our duty. We invited them because we loved them. We would never have stopped inviting them, because of that love.”

Our Most Important Duty

We all have the responsibility to share the gospel. The Savior’s last words to His disciples as He ascended to the heavens were:

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20).

In this dispensation we have heard the constant voice of prophets telling us of our duty to preach the gospel. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, “After

all that has been said, the greatest and most important duty is to preach the Gospel.”¹

President Russell M. Nelson told new mission presidents, “Your ability to link the enthusiasm of the missionaries with the stability and loving efforts of the members cannot be overemphasized. Your success will be multiplied exponentially as you harness the power of members with whom you serve.”²

Alma in Ammonihah

The experience of Alma as he teaches in Ammonihah helps us understand how missionaries and members can work together. Before Alma began preaching, he “labored much in the spirit, wrestling with God in mighty prayer, that he would pour out his Spirit upon the people who were in the city; that he would also grant that he might baptize them unto repentance” (Alma 8:10).

Alma and Amulek provide a great example for us to follow as we invite others to come unto Christ.





Alma was what I like to call a *Preach My Gospel* missionary. He focused on teaching by the Spirit. He invited others to come unto Christ with the hope that they would enter a covenant relationship with the Lord through baptism.

How did the people respond? They rejected him. He found no one willing to listen. Feeling quite discouraged, Alma decided to leave. But an angel appeared and said: “Blessed art thou, Alma; therefore, lift up thy head and rejoice, for thou hast great cause to rejoice; for thou hast been faithful in keeping the commandments of God from the time which thou receivedst thy first message. . . . I am sent to command thee [to] return to the city of Ammonihah, and preach again unto the people” (Alma 8:15–16).

Why Alma Was Blessed

Why was Alma blessed? He was blessed because he was faithful in what he had been called to do. Was he blessed because of his success in baptizing? No, the Lord does not judge us according to our success in sharing the gospel but according to our willingness to do so.

Alma was asked to return and preach to the same people who had totally rejected his message the first time. He “returned speedily” and “entered . . . by another way” (Alma 8:18). I don’t believe Alma said anything like, “This won’t

work.” I believe he began looking for a different way to be more effective. Perhaps he was wondering if his approach needed to be different. Maybe he thought he could find someone in a different part of the city.

Actually, the Lord *had* prepared someone to listen. His name was Amulek, someone we might refer to today as a “less-active” member (see Alma 10:5–6).

How Amulek Was Blessed

Alma “tarried many days” with Amulek (Alma 8:27). But what did Alma do during that time? Amulek later explains, “[Alma] hath blessed mine house, he hath blessed me, and my women, and my children, and my father and my kinsfolk; yea, even all my kindred hath he blessed, and the blessing of the Lord hath rested upon us according to the words which he spake” (Alma 10:11).

Imagine what this event might look like today. Alma would begin his conversation with Amulek and, finding that Amulek was less-active would ask to teach Amulek’s family. He would then teach Amulek, his wife, and their children. Alma would help the whole family to prepare to enter the covenant path. Alma wouldn’t stop with just one family, either. He would probably ask, “Amulek, do you have other family members we can teach?” And Amulek would respond, “Well, my father lives next door.” Then Alma would ask Amulek to invite his father to come listen.

Now think about what would happen to the less-active member, Amulek. Amulek would have already received the lessons with his own family. Now he would receive them again as Alma taught Amulek’s father. The fire of the gospel would grow deeper and deeper within Amulek’s soul. Then what would this good

missionary Alma do? He would teach Amulek's kinsfolk and kindred.

Working Together

Let's return to the scriptural account. After this success with Amulek and his family, when Alma is ready to preach again, the Lord tells Alma to take Amulek with him. Note that Alma, the missionary, is now going out with Amulek, the member. Do you see how the Lord is asking for the missionary and the member to work together?

And what happens now? When Alma speaks, the people reject the message again. But then Amulek, the newly active member, shares his testimony. "And now, when Amulek had spoken these words the people began to be astonished" (Alma 10:12).

Whose words astonished the people of Ammonihah? Was it Alma, the missionary, or Amulek, the member? It was the member! Does that mean that Amulek was a better teacher than Alma? No! Many of the people that missionaries teach think, "These young missionaries just don't understand." For example, someone learning about tithing might say, "They don't have to pay the rent, buy the food, and deal with all the bills like I have to. How can I pay 10 percent to the Lord?"

But when the missionaries have an Amulek with them, a member with whom the person being taught can relate, and the member testifies about tithing, then the person being taught is "astonished."

An Example to Follow

The experience of Alma and Amulek creates an example for us:

- A member teaches (or ministers to) a less-active member.
- The member invites the less-active member to share what he has learned with his family.

- As the less-active member shares the gospel, his own testimony catches fire.
- He wants to share what he has felt, not only with his family but with others as well.
- The member continues to seek and receive multiple referrals.

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) said that a friend is one "to whom [the investigator or new member] can constantly turn, who will walk beside him, who will answer his questions, who will understand his problems."³

It is my testimony to you that there is not a more effective way of bringing less-active members back on the covenant path than by inviting them to participate in the missionary lessons and then encouraging them to share what they have learned. When members testify to those the missionaries teach, it is the member who will often astonish or touch those being taught. ■

NOTES

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (2007), 330.
2. Russell M. Nelson, in Jason Swensen, "President Nelson Invokes Five Hopes, Blessings upon New Mission Leaders," Church News section of ChurchofJesusChrist.org, June 24, 2019, news.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Find the Lambs, Feed the Sheep," *Ensign*, May 1999, 108.

SIX QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU BE LIKE AMULEK

As you ponder these questions, ask what you can do to become like Amulek as you share the gospel:

1. Do we give up the first time someone does not accept our invitation?
2. Whom could we invite this month?
3. Whom do we know who is not currently active in the Church and who could be blessed by taking the missionary lessons?
4. When those to whom we minister feel the Holy Ghost, do we ask them who else we could teach with the missionaries?
5. How could we befriend people the missionaries are teaching?
6. Could we invite the missionaries to teach in our home?