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THE WORK OF SALVATION Then AND Now

*The five responsibilities of the work of salvation are not new to this dispensation.
They were taught and practiced in Book of Mormon times.*

Speaking of the latter days and of the revealed truth that would then flood the world, Nephi prophesied that the people “shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved” (1 Nephi 15:14; see also Moses 7:62). In fulfillment of Nephi’s prophecy, the Church today seeks to help men and women across the earth learn about and build their lives on the Savior’s doctrine so that they may come unto Him and walk the path to salvation.

Living prophets and apostles teach us that “members of the Church of Jesus Christ are sent forth ‘to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men’ (D&C 138:56). This work of salvation includes member missionary work, convert retention, activation of less-active members, temple and family history work, and teaching the gospel.”¹

The Book of Mormon shows that Church members in ancient times emphasized “missionary work, convert retention, activation of less-active members, temple and family history work, and teaching the gospel” as well. The fact that these essential member responsibilities remain constant across dispensations is a powerful confirming witness that God is unchanging and that He loves all of His children, wherever and whenever they have lived.

Missionary Work

The Book of Mormon clearly teaches the doctrine that is the basis of missionary work. For example, Nephi wrote that “if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:13; see also 3 Nephi 11:31–40; 27:13–22).

Thus, it is no surprise that there are stirring accounts of missionary work in the Book of Mormon. For instance, each of the sons of Mosiah refused to accept the responsibilities associated with serving as the king of the Nephites, and instead they went to the land of Nephi to preach the gospel to the Lamanites, who were the bitter enemies of the Nephites. Their mission lasted some 14 years, and thousands joined the Church as converts. (See Mosiah 28; Alma 17–27.)

Following the example of missionary work in the Book of Mormon, the Church today has a missionary effort unequaled by anything in its history.

Convert Retention

Nephi also wrote about encouraging new members to remain active in the gospel so that they might receive eternal life:

“After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.

“Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:19–20).

Church leaders in Book of Mormon times took specific steps to help new members stay on the strait and narrow path. Having seen our day and knowing that we would face similar challenges (see Mormon 8:35), Moroni included in his writing some of those practices for helping new members remain faithful to their covenants:

“And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith.

“And the church did meet together oft, to fast and to pray, and to speak one with another concerning the welfare of their souls” (Moroni 6:4–5).

The modern Church follows Book of Mormon convert-retention patterns in our ward councils, priesthood quorums, and other organizations.²

Activation of Less-Active Members

Toward the end of his ministry, Alma felt great distress about the spiritual welfare of a group of dissenters from

the Church who called themselves Zoramites. The Book of Mormon relates that “his heart again began to sicken because of the iniquity of the people.

“For it was the cause of great sorrow to Alma to know of iniquity among his people; therefore his heart was exceedingly sorrowful because of the separation of the Zoramites from the Nephites” (Alma 31:1–2).

Alma organized an effort to reclaim the Zoramites. He chose faithful companions and prayed for himself and for his companions in the work, asking God to “comfort their souls in Christ,” give them strength to bear the afflictions that their labors would entail, and grant them “success in bringing [the Zoramites] again unto [the Father] in Christ” (Alma 31:32, 34). He then gave his companions priesthood blessings, and they commenced their labors (see Alma 31:36).

When the risen Lord ministered personally among the people in Bountiful, He taught His chosen disciples to seek continually to rescue those who had strayed from the strait and narrow path. He said, “Unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent, and come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them; and ye shall be the means of bringing salvation unto them” (3 Nephi 18:32).

The modern Church’s efforts to rekindle faith in the hearts of less-active members mirror the teachings of the Savior and the prophets recorded in the Book of Mormon.

Temple and Family History Work

After the Nephites separated from the Lamanites, they built a temple. Nephi recorded: “And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land, wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon’s temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceedingly fine” (2 Nephi 5:16).

The Book of Mormon records that Jacob, King Benjamin, Alma, and Amulek all taught in temples (see Jacob 1:17;



YOUR ROLE IN THE WORK OF SALVATION

Every Church member can do something to “labor in [the Lord’s] vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men” (D&C 138:56). Prayerfully consider what next steps you could take in missionary work, convert retention, activation, temple and family history work, or teaching the gospel. You could write your plans in your journal or discuss them with your family or home or visiting teachers.

Mosiah 1:18; Alma 16:13). The books of Alma and Helaman make reference to multiple temples among the people (see Alma 16:13; Helaman 3:9).

The Savior chose the temple in Bountiful as the site for His appearance among the surviving Nephites and Lamanites following His Resurrection (see 3 Nephi 11:1). He also ensured that the doctrine underlying family history work was taught to the people. He quoted Malachi concerning Elijah’s latter-day appearance, saying:

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord;

“And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse” (3 Nephi 25:5–6).

The Book of Mormon makes frequent reference to keeping family histories. Lehi sent his sons back to Jerusalem to obtain the brass plates, which contained the “record of the Jews and also a genealogy of [his] forefathers” (1 Nephi 3:3). The book of Ether sets forth the names of succeeding sovereigns and, as necessary, their siblings and children, showing that extensive family history records were kept among the people.

The Church’s worldwide temple and family history initiatives are consistent with Book of Mormon teachings.

Teaching the Gospel

The gospel of Jesus Christ is taught throughout the Book of Mormon. Perhaps these words of Nephi capture the spirit of that faithful teaching and its sacred purpose: “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

Many of the great teachings in the Book of Mormon come from parents teaching their children. Think of Lehi teaching Jacob about “opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11) or Alma teaching Corianton that “wickedness never was happiness” (Alma 41:10) or the stripling warriors being “taught by their mothers, that if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma 56:47).

The five responsibilities of the work of salvation are not new to the world in this final dispensation. They were taught and practiced in Book of Mormon times and have always been part of the “very points of [Christ’s] doctrine” (1 Nephi 15:14). ■

NOTES

1. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 5.0.
2. See *Handbook 2*, sections 4 and 5.