

According to Our Will

*Do we really want God's blessings?
Or do we simply say we do?*

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The relationship between God, His prophets, and His children is often misunderstood. For example, one may wonder why many of the people in Enoch's day attained Zion, and yet in Moses's day the people rejected the higher law and were obliged to settle for the law of Moses as a schoolmaster designed to bring Israel to Christ (see Galatians 3:24). If Enoch had lived in Moses's day and Moses in Enoch's day, would the outcomes have been different? The scriptures make it clear that, in reality, it is the people and not the prophet who most often make the difference.

This was the case in the days of Samuel the prophet. The people in Israel rejected the Lord's warning given through Samuel that their request to have a king instead of the system of judges the Lord had established would lead to oppression and loss of freedom (see 1 Samuel 8:4–22). The Lord did not blame Samuel but explained, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me" (1 Samuel 8:7).

The scriptures are full of examples where the Lord's people, because of their choices, received less than what they could have had. In the allegory Zenos shared, we read how the Lord of the vineyard wept and on three occasions asked, "What could I have done more for my vineyard?" (see Jacob 5:41, 47, 49). He had nourished the vineyard and worked in it "almost all the day long" (verse 47), and yet the vineyard brought forth little righteous fruit. Clearly the Lord's people do not receive fewer spiritual blessings because He or His prophets desire to give them less. God's love for us is manifest in His giving us the precious gift of agency and allowing us to "live and . . . do according to [our] own will" (Mosiah 2:21).



Aligning Our Will with God's

The Savior is the perfect example of how to use our agency best. He declared, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). Further, He said of His relationship to the Father, "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). Abinadi aptly described the Savior's submission as "the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father" (Mosiah 15:7).

Submitting one's will to God's is not always easy. The Savior Himself declared, "I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning" (3 Nephi 11:11). Thus, part of the key to a prophet's success in bringing people to Christ has much to do with the willingness of the people he serves to "suffer the will of the Father," or allow their will to be "swallowed up in the will of the Father." The implication is that submitting our will to God's will requires sacrifice and likely some suffering.

One of the classic examples of these principles in action is found in the Book of Mormon. The Lord called Abinadi to prophesy against the wickedness of King Noah and his people. All that is known of Abinadi is that he was "a man among them" (Mosiah 11:20). He alone stood against the trends and standards of his society. His position was not popular or well received, and it ultimately led to his death (see Mosiah 12:8–9; 17:12–13).

With the exception of Alma, one of Noah's priests, Abinadi's words fell on deaf ears. Yet that one conversion had a lasting impact on Nephite society for over 500 years and is still impacting millions today. Alma allowed his will to be "swallowed up in the will of the Father." His outspoken defense of Abinadi forced him to flee for his life (see Mosiah 17:2–4). His secret proselyting ventures back into the city of Nephi ultimately led to the conversion of 450 souls who were willing to leave their homes and society and depart into the wilderness (see Mosiah 18:33–35).

The success of this people, in the city they called Helam (see Mosiah 23:16–20), was rooted in their faithfulness to their covenants made at baptism. Indeed, they stood as "witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places" (Mosiah 18:9; see verses 8–10). The people were



The Savior showed us how to use our agency. He always submitted His will to the Father's.

not just going through the motion of doing good things. Their faithful activities led them to become "children of God" (verse 22), "knit together in unity and in love" (verse 21). They faithfully observed the Sabbath and gave thanks to God every day (see verse 23). Because of "their own free will and good desires towards God," they imparted of their substance both temporally and spiritually to those in need and to one another (see verses 27–29). Their faithfulness, joy, and unity in their society led Mormon to declare retrospectively, "How blessed are they, for they shall sing to [the Lord's] praise forever" (verse 30).

In the midst of their prosperity, Alma's people were subjected to enslavement for a time by the Lamanites and Amulon and his fellow priests. Even in these circumstances they were strong in their faith and continued to submit to the will of God, knowing He would ultimately deliver them from their trials. (See Mosiah 23:36–24:16.)

They were eventually led by the hand of God to the land of Zarahemla, where they formed the basis of a righteous reformation in that land (see Mosiah 25:5–10, 14–24). From Abinadi's one convert, Alma (in approximately 148 BC), would spring a succession of righteous leaders and record keepers going primarily from father to son down to Amos (in approximately AD 194; see 4 Nephi 1:21). Amos would turn the records over to his brother Ammaron (see 4 Nephi 1:47), who would eventually entrust them to Mormon (see Mormon 1:2–3), who abridged them and compiled most of the Book of Mormon.

Although Abinadi may have died believing he had been unsuccessful in bringing King Noah's people to the Lord, he had in fact succeeded. Because of the will and desires of one convert, Alma, the lives of many of the people Alma taught were changed and the entire history of the Book of Mormon people was affected. Alma's story is a reminder of the significant impact that can occur when one individual determines to align his or her will with the will of the Father.

Receiving What We Really Want

When details of the lives of the Lord's prophets have been preserved, it is easy to see that some of them were not popular in their day (for example, see Helaman 10:1–3; 3 Nephi 7:15–20). Clearly these prophets desired to give more than they were allowed

to, being hindered by the wickedness of the people. Like the Savior, they could have said, "How oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not" (3 Nephi 10:5).

This yearning to give people more of the blessings of the plan of salvation is common among the Lord's prophets. One of the most profound expressions of this desire comes from the words of Alma's son, also named Alma. After Alma the Younger and his close friends—the sons of King Mosiah—had spent years in missionary and activation efforts, Alma declared his desire that he could be an angel (see Alma 29:1). His motivation was

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not to receive fame or even to impress doubters and unbelievers. His desire was that people would "repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth" (verse 2).

Even with this righteous, unselfish desire, Alma realized he was asking amiss. He could not coerce people to repent or change their nature. His words are sobering and insightful. He declared, "I know that [God] granteth unto men according to *their desire*, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he allotteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable,

according to *their wills*, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction” (verse 4; emphasis added).

In essence, Alma’s message is that we will get what we really want, not what we say we want. It is easy to express a desire for exaltation but not so easy to live worthy of it. “What we insistently desire, over time, is what we will eventually become and what we will receive in eternity,” said Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.¹ Because of our agency, God grants us what we really want. If we want to rebel and reject His plan, He allows that, even though He would deeply desire

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otherwise. But it also means that if we really want exaltation and demonstrate our desire by living worthy of it, we will receive it. In the instance of Alma, he apparently seems to have been granted his desire (see Alma 45:18–19).

Desiring What Matters Most

The perpetual problem Heavenly Father’s children have had throughout history is keeping their desires focused on the things that matter most. “How powerful a role our true desires play in our lives!” declared Elder Maxwell. “Desire both initiates our actions

and sustains us—for good or evil. If we desire wealth or power, these will tend to be the moving causes of our actions. If instead we desire spiritual things and are obedient, the promised blessings will come to us. Just as it is not possible to save an individual against his will, so blessings do not come against our wills.”²

The scriptures tell us that the Lord grants unto us “line upon line, precept upon precept” as we listen to his precepts and follow his counsel. The sobering thought is, He has warned that for those who refuse to accept and abide by what He has already given, “from them shall be taken away even that which they have” (see 2 Nephi 28:30). This last phrase is intriguing. Apparently our faith in the Lord’s word will be diminished if we refuse to accept and live up to the principles He has already given us. Alma the Younger explained it this way: “They that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word *until* they know nothing concerning his mysteries; and then they are taken captive by the devil” (Alma 12:11; emphasis added).

So what are we to do as we face challenging times? Elder Maxwell stated:

“I do not know what lies ahead of you . . . , but my advice would be to fasten your seat belts and hold on firmly to your principles! . . .

“ . . . As you submit your wills to God, you are giving Him the *only* thing you *can* actually give Him that is really yours to give. Don’t wait too long to find the altar or to begin to place the gift of your wills upon it! No need to wait for a receipt; the Lord has His own special ways of acknowledging.”³

Each of us is in charge of our own destiny. We will receive that which we ultimately choose. The famous author and theologian

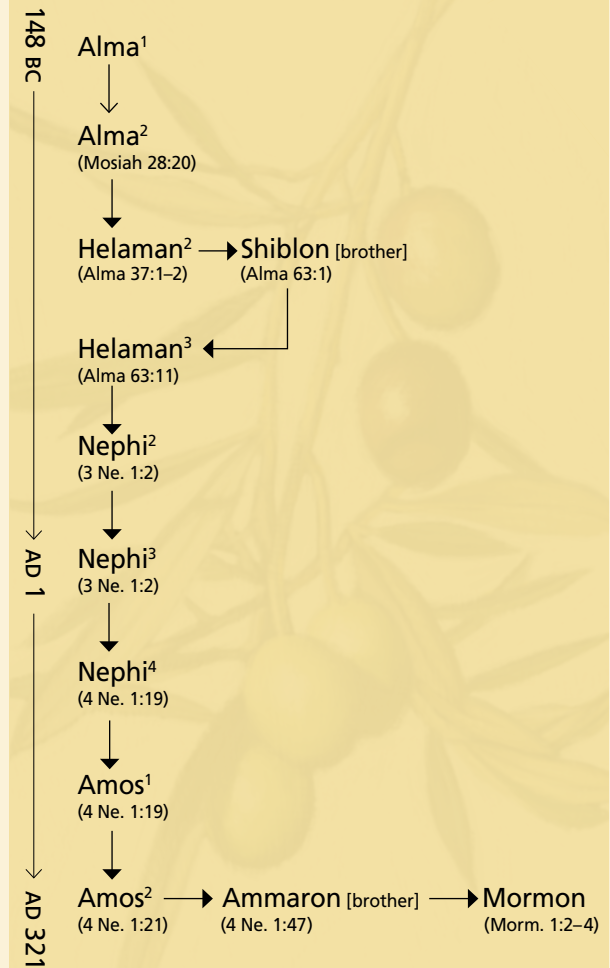


The story of Alma illustrates the significant impact one person can have who aligns his or her will with God's.

C. S. Lewis profoundly explained: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it. . . . No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it.”⁴ ■

NOTES

1. Neal A. Maxwell, “According to the Desire of [Our] Hearts,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 21.
2. Neal A. Maxwell, “*Not My Will, But Thine*” (1988), 89.
3. Neal A. Maxwell, “Remember How Merciful the Lord Hath Been,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 44, 46.
4. C. S. Lewis, *The Business of Heaven: Daily Readings from C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper (1984), 142; see also Doctrine and Covenants 88:32.



THE IMPACT OF A SINGLE CONVERSION

As far as we know, the Nephite prophet Abinadi had only one convert: Alma. But Alma’s decision to align his will with the Lord’s had a ripple effect that still impacts people more than 2,000 years later. Alma’s descendants kept the records of the Nephites for more than 400 years. The last of them, Ammaron, turned the records over to Mormon, whose compilation and abridgment of the records as the Book of Mormon blesses countless lives today. (The superscripts in the chart identify the first, second, third, or fourth person in the Book of Mormon who had that name.)