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What Parents Should Teach Their Children from the Book of Mosiah

2

Kenneth W. Anderson

Most parents want to be good parents, to prepare their children to live successful lives. The living prophets of the Lord and the scriptures have instructed parents to teach their children to learn and obey the decrees of God (Ether 2:11). One of the best ways to learn those decrees is from reading the Book of Mormon. In the April 1960 general conference of the Church, Elder Marion G. Romney, then of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said the following:

I feel certain that if, in our homes, parents will read from the Book of Mormon prayerfully and regularly, both by themselves and with their children, the spirit of that great book will come to permeate our homes and all who dwell therein. The spirit of reverence will increase, mutual respect and consideration for each other will grow. The spirit of contention will depart. Parents will counsel their children in greater love and wisdom. Children will be more responsive and submissive to that counsel. Righteousness will increase. Faith, hope, and charity—the true love of Christ—will abound in our homes and lives, bringing in their wake peace, joy, and happiness. (436)

When President Ezra Taft Benson gave his first conference address after he was sustained as the prophet and president of the Church, he quoted this part of Elder Romney's talk and seconded his teachings. Then in his concluding address to that conference, President Benson said:

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I bless you with increased discernment to judge between Christ and anti-Christ. I bless you with increased power to do good and resist evil. I bless you with increased *understanding* of the Book of Mormon. I promise you that from this moment forward, if we will daily sup from its pages and abide by its precepts, God will pour out upon each child of Zion and the Church a blessing hitherto unknown. (“A Sacred Responsibility” 78)

In light of this counsel to read and teach the Book of Mormon in our homes, this paper will present five simple, yet powerful scriptural lessons from the book of Mosiah that parents can teach their children. It will also give practical suggestions on how to make this teaching effective. If mothers and fathers will teach their children these principles in the right spirit, they will be better able to reach out to them in love as they invite them to live by the light of the gospel.

Lesson 1: Teach Children to Love, Study, and Obey the Scriptures and the Living Prophets

King Benjamin taught his children the importance of studying the word of God: “And it came to pass that he [king Benjamin] had three sons; and he called their names Mosiah, and Helorum, and Helaman. And he caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers, that thereby they might become men of understanding” (Mosiah 1:2). These sons, as President Benson notes, “needed to understand and use the language of holy writ. If they didn’t know the right words, they wouldn’t know the plan” (“Worthy Fathers, Worthy Sons” 36). When parents use words like *Jesus Christ, Savior, Creation, Fall, Atonement, covenant, salvation, justice, mercy, and eternal life* in the home, they familiarize their children with the language of holy writ.

Having taught his children the language of the scriptures, king Benjamin also ensured that they understood the importance of the word of God:

My sons, I would that ye should remember that were it not for these plates . . . we must have suffered in ignorance, . . . not knowing the

mysteries of God. For it were not possible that our father, Lehi, could have remembered all these things, to have taught them to his children, except it were for the help of these plates; . . . therefore he could read these engravings, and teach them to his children, that thereby they could teach them to their children, and so fulfilling the commandments of God. (Mosiah 1:3–4)

Verse 5 notes that had they not had “his commandments always before [their] eyes,” they would have dwindled in unbelief as the Lamanites had. For us today to “have his commandments always before our [children’s] eyes” means that we need to encourage them to read the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon.

Children may require assistance as they read the Book of Mormon the first time. Some children need nothing but the idea and some encouragement. Others, at an early age, need help to read even a line. Some progress through the Book of Mormon only by taking turns reading a verse with a parent. Over the years, they will begin reading on their own. Although we don’t know how much children understand the Book of Mormon the first time they read it, when they complete the book they experience a change in their hearts. The Church becomes their Church. They belong. Confidence floods through their souls and sweeps away bridges of disbelief and obstacles of doubt.

There is another important lesson to learn from king Benjamin’s example. In Mosiah 1:6–7, king Benjamin tenderly bears his testimony to his sons, saying, “O my sons, I would that ye should remember that these sayings are true, and also that these records are true. . . . Remember to search them diligently, that ye may profit thereby.” The Prophet Joseph Smith testified of the importance of parents’ bearing testimony to their children when he said:

We have also seen that it was human testimony, and human testimony only, that excited this inquiry [after a knowledge of the glory of God] in their minds in the first instance. It was the credence they gave to the testimony of their fathers, it having aroused their minds to inquire after the knowledge of God. That inquiry frequently terminated, indeed always terminated when rightly pursued, in the most glorious discoveries and eternal certainty. (*Lectures on Faith* 2:56)

Another way to teach children to love, study, and obey the word of God is to tell them bedtime stories from the scriptures followed by personal, human testimony rather than the fables and creations of men and women. Children then fall asleep with the stories of God's servants resting upon their minds.

In addition to teaching children to love, study, and obey the word of God as found in the scriptures, we also need to teach them to love, study, and obey the living prophets. Alma stresses the importance of the living prophets in Mosiah 18:19, where he commands the people "that they should teach nothing save it were the things which he had taught, and which had been spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets."

One can regularly record general conference on videotape and use these talks as a basis for family home evening to teach children to love, study, and obey the living prophets. When children give talks at church they will then tend to teach "none other things than that which the prophets and apostles have written" (D&C 52:9).

Elder James E. Faust stated at a recent general conference: "We have been promised that the President of the Church will receive guidance for all of us as the revelator for the Church. Our safety lies in paying heed to that which he says and following his counsel" (10). As Elder Faust suggests, parents need to set an example for children by supporting Church leadership.

In summary, here are five suggestions of how we can teach our children to love, study, and obey the scriptures and the living prophets:

1. Speak with them in the language of holy writ.
2. Help them read the Book of Mormon from their earliest years.
3. Bear personal, human testimony to them.
4. Tell them bedtime scripture stories so that these stories rest upon their minds.

5. Let them see your example of upholding and sustaining Church leaders.

Having positive experiences with the scriptures and the words of the living prophets is essential for each child. Such experiences need to be repeated over and over, day after day and year after year, with such regularity that gospel lessons become fixed in their minds. President Benson said: "Teaching is done by precept and example, and by word and deed. A good model is the best teacher. Therefore, a father's [or mother's] first responsibility is to set the proper example" ("Worthy Fathers, Worthy Sons" 35). Testimony and instruction without a living model may not be sufficient to instill the desire to believe within each child.

Lesson 2: Teach Children That the Lord Has Come to Teach Us How to Obtain Eternal Life

President Benson stated:

What did the righteous fathers of the Book of Mormon teach their sons? They taught them many things, but the overarching message was "the great plan of the Eternal God"—the Fall, rebirth, Atonement, Resurrection, Judgment, eternal life. (See Alma 34:9.) . . .

Those in the Book of Mormon who were taught nothing concerning the Lord but only concerning worldly knowledge became a cunning and wicked people. (See Mosiah 24:5, 7.) ("Worthy Fathers, Worthy Sons" 36)

How can parents use the book of Mosiah to teach "the great plan of the Eternal God"? Here is one example. Through brief discussion each child can perceive three main problems inherent in mortal life: (1) not knowing how to get back to our Heavenly Father's home (attaining eternal life) is a problem for every person; (2) everyone is going to die; (3) no one is perfect, and everyone will commit some sin.

The book of Mosiah is rich in doctrinal statements that can help children find the answers the Lord has given to these three problems of mortality. Consider the following scriptural

statements as examples of the many points of doctrine that can be learned and taught from the book of Mosiah.

For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay. (Mosiah 3:5)

And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary. (Mosiah 3:8)

He should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, . . . man was created after the image of God. (Mosiah 7:27)

[Christ] shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men. (Mosiah 3:5–6)

And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name; and even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him. (Mosiah 3:9)

And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people. (Mosiah 3:7)

For behold, . . . his blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned. But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God! For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. (Mosiah 3:11–12)

He shall rise the third day from the dead. (Mosiah 3:10)

The bands of death shall be broken, and the Son reigneth, and hath power over the dead; therefore, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead. (Mosiah 15:20)

And behold, he standeth to judge the world; and behold, all these things are done that a righteous judgment might come upon the children of men. (Mosiah 3:10)

I say unto you, if you have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power . . . and also, the atonement which has been prepared from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life, I mean the life of the mortal body—I say, this is the man who receiveth salvation. (Mosiah 4:6, 7)

These and other scriptural statements can help parents teach their children how Heavenly Father’s plan overcomes the problems of ignorance, death, and sin. The “knowledge of the goodness of God” has eliminated ignorance; Christ’s “matchless power” has broken the bands of death so that each person will be resurrected; and the Atonement has paid for the sins of those who repent and continue to keep the commandments until they die.

President Benson has said: “All truths are not of the same value. The saving truths of salvation are of greatest worth. These truths the fathers taught plainly, frequently, and fervently. Are we fathers doing likewise?” (“Worthy Fathers, Worthy Sons” 36). The book of Mosiah is certainly a rich source of these “saving truths,” which parents today can teach their children.

Lesson 3: Teach Children the Difference Between the Man of Christ and the Natural Man

“When king Benjamin made an end of speaking the words which had been delivered to him by the angel of the Lord, [his people] cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” King Benjamin’s people had put off “the natural man” (Mosiah 3:19), and the spirit of the Lord had come upon them. They received a remission of their sins and peace of conscience because of their faith in Jesus Christ (Mosiah 4:1–3).

Just like the people of king Benjamin, believers today can obtain a forgiveness of sins, receive the Holy Ghost, and have peace of conscience. However, once a person is baptized and has obtained an initial remission of sins, the challenge lies in retaining that remission of sins. Parents can help their children understand how to retain a remission of sins by teaching them the difference between the man of Christ and the natural man (see Hel 3:29; Mosiah 3:19). This can be done by contrasting some of the qualities of each type of person as described by king Benjamin in Mosiah 4.

TABLE 1 *The Man of Christ vs. the Natural Man*

<i>The Man of Christ A Friend to God</i>	<i>The Natural Man An Enemy to God</i>
Has no mind to injure others (4:13).	Has more concern for himself than for others.
Does not suffer children to go hungry or naked (4:14).	Neglects his children.
Does not transgress the laws of God (4:14).	Transgresses the laws of God.
Does not fight, quarrel, or serve the devil (4:14).	Fights and quarrels; serves the devil.
Loves others (4:15).	Shows hatred to others.
Serves others (4:15).	Serves himself.
Visits the sick and imparts to the poor (4:16, 26).	Neglects the sick and the poor.
Uses the wisdom of God; does not run faster than he has strength; is orderly and reliable (4:27).	Follows the wisdom of the world; often runs faster than he has strength; not dependable in all things.
Watches himself—his thoughts, words, and deeds (4:30).	Not in control of his thoughts, words, and deeds.
Keeps the commandments (4:30).	Does not keep the commandments.

Because examples of both these attitudes are all around us, parents need to teach their children the many differences between the natural man and the man of Christ so their children

will be able to recognize the differences on their own. If parents do not help them do this, the powerful messages from their peers and the media will set their minds for them. Children can distinguish the man of Christ from the natural man if parents teach them how.

The best way to teach children how to be a person of Christ is by example, yet parents sometimes fail to act as men and women of Christ. This is especially true in the family and home setting. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has stated:

Life in a family means we are known as we are, that our frailties are exposed and, hopefully, we then correct them.

The affection and thoughtfulness required in the home are no abstract exercises in love, no mere rhetoric concerning some distant human cause. Family life is an encounter with raw selfishness, with the need for civility, of taking turns, of being hurt and yet forgiving, and of being at the mercy of others' moods.

Family life is a constant challenge, not a periodic performance we can render on a stage and then run for the privacy of a dressing room to be alone with ourselves. The home gives us our greatest chance, however, to align our public and private behavior, to reduce the hypocrisy in our lives—to be more congruent with Christ. (3)

Parents themselves need to learn to be more congruent with Christ so that their children can learn from their examples what men and women of Christ are like.

Lesson 4: Teach Children to Make Covenants with Christ and Obtain Power to Become Like Him

Before we can become a man or woman of Christ we must make covenants. Parents must teach their children what covenants are and why they are important. Victor L. Ludlow explains:

The word *covenant* comes from the Hebrew word *b'rith*, which has at least two probable Semitic roots. The Akkadian root *birithu* means to "bind or fetter," while the Hebrew root *barah* means "to eat bread with." The meanings of both roots contribute to an accurate comprehension of covenant concepts as taught in the Old Testament. In the scriptures, although covenant-making is serious and solemn, it is

not something harsh, like adversaries binding and carefully obligating themselves as they sign a compact; but it is something gentle, like two friends (especially a father with his children) sitting and eating bread together, externally symbolizing an internal commitment to each other. (Ludlow 4)

In the book of Mosiah, king Benjamin and Alma both teach about the baptismal covenant. It is an agreement in which the one baptized promises to do the following:

1. Be baptized, do God's will, and keep his commandments (Mosiah 5:5)
2. Bear one another's burdens (Mosiah 18:8)
3. Mourn with those that mourn (Mosiah 18:9)
4. Comfort those in need of comfort (Mosiah 18:9)
5. Stand as a witness of God in all things until we die (Mosiah 18:9)
6. Serve Christ and keep his commandments (Mosiah 18:10)

Then Christ promises to do the following for the one baptized:

1. Give those baptized a spiritual rebirth (Mosiah 5:7, 9)
2. Become their new father (Mosiah 5:7)
3. Make them free under his head, his direction (Mosiah 5:8)
4. Give them a new name, the name of Christ (Mosiah 5:9)
5. Give them a new voice, the voice of the Spirit (Mosiah 5:12; 18:10)
6. Give them eternal life (Mosiah 18:9)

Parents should teach their children that this baptismal covenant is renewable every week through the ordinance of the sacrament. Partaking of the sacrament worthily is like being baptized again. It is an external symbol of "an internal commitment to each other" (Ludlow 4). Those who partake of the sacrament take upon themselves the name of Christ, remembering him in all that they do. Then as they keep his

commandments he gives them the Holy Spirit and the hope of eternal life. The power to become like Christ comes from obedience and worthy participation in the sacred ordinances (D&C 84:20). Because of Jesus Christ and his atoning sacrifice, when we sin we may repent (see D&C 58:43), return to obedience, and become clean again.

Children, especially teenagers, ask, “When will my parents ever think I am mature enough to act for myself?” When children are willing not only to take upon themselves this covenant but also to live it, to do God’s will and keep his commandments all of their days, then parents should be willing to give them increasing freedom. When they covenant to follow Christ, they will begin to govern themselves through increased obedience. Parents should teach their children that making and keeping baptismal covenants and renewing them through the ordinance of the sacrament will enable them to become more like Christ.

Lesson 5: Teach Children That God Made Humankind in His Own Image

For a number of years, the real reason the prophet Abinadi was slain was a mystery to me. Why would wicked king Noah and those worldly priests slay a man for saying “that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and . . . that he should take upon him the image of man” (Mosiah 7:27)?

Then one evening, a lecturer solved the mystery for me. He simply quoted all of Mosiah 7:27 and part of verse 28:

And because he said unto them that Christ was the God, the Father of all things, and said that he should take upon him the image of man, and it should be the image after which man was created in the beginning; or in other words, he said that man was created after the image of God, and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood, and go forth upon the face of the earth—And now, because he said this, they did put him to death.

It became clear that if God the Son, Jesus Christ, took upon him a body, just as humankind has, and still lived a sinless life, then this knowledge would force a terrible self-imposed indictment on the unrepentant and immoral. They would be cut to the core “with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire” (Mosiah 2:38). We need not wonder why king Noah and his priests put Abinadi to death. Being in a body “that was created after the image of God” is life’s test. Because of their licentious lifestyle, they could not tolerate Abinadi’s voice of truth and silenced him with a fiery death.

When parents understand and teach the full implications of our being clothed in a body “created after the image of God” (Mosiah 7:27), they can provide their children with a basis for a moral life. Regarding the nature of God the Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

If we start right, it is easy to go right all the time; but if we start wrong, we may go wrong, and it be a hard matter to get right. . . .

. . . If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves. . . .

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. . . .

. . . he was once a man like us; yea, . . . God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself. (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 343, 345–46)

If children are taught in their earliest years that God has a body and that they were created in his image; and if in their adolescent years, when their bodies are maturing, they could see their bodies as “clothing” in a likeness of their Heavenly Father’s or Heavenly Mother’s bodies; and if they understand that this body puts them “in the image of God” and serves as a testing vehicle for their mortal life; if they can conceive these eternal truths and hold them in their minds through all of their mortal life, these truths will provide them a basis for moral conduct. And when an untoward generation teaches them the mechanics of procreation without the morals of godliness, the children who already understand the full implications of being “created after the image of God” will not accept the errors of

the world. Further, when they become completely mature men and women and are tempted, as all are, they will have both reason and power to flee from sin as did Joseph of old (Gen 39:12).

Nothing is more sacred than for a loving parent to sit down with a child in private and discuss in tenderness the sacred powers of procreation. This type of teaching, with regular follow-up interviews for support, can be the firm basis for a child's holding to correct moral values and conduct throughout life.¹

Parents who teach these truths allow their children to see themselves clothed in the image of God. Understanding this concept can mean life to a questioning or tempted child. When it comes to children understanding their bodies, Jesus Christ is their only light in the darkened world. For "he was conceived by the power of God" (Mosiah 15:3) and "dwelleth in flesh" (Mosiah 15:2), but "having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father" (Mosiah 15:2), he did suffer temptation and did not yield (Mosiah 15:5).

Conclusion

The book of Mosiah contains several lessons which parents should teach their children. I have presented five possible lessons in this paper, but there are many more which could be taught. If parents teach their children from their earliest years to love, study, and obey the word of God as found in the scriptures and the words of the living prophets, then their children will learn from the Lord how to obtain eternal life. They will learn that there is a difference between the man of

¹ Three excellent references parents should use to teach their children these principles are *To Young Men Only* by Elder Boyd K. Packer (N.p.: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976); *A Parent's Guide* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985); and "Teaching Children About Human Intimacy," *Follow Me: Relief Society Personal Study Guide 1989* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988) 184-92. Each of these booklets teaches that parents are responsible to teach their children wholesome attitudes and a sound understanding of their bodies and of the law of chastity.

Christ and the natural man, that by making and keeping covenants with Christ they will have power to become like him, and that God made man and woman in his own image. Then they will avoid “suffering in ignorance,” as President Benson has said so many do today.

I began this paper by quoting Elder Romney’s and President Benson’s admonitions to teach children to read from the Book of Mormon to lead them to eternal life. It is my prayer that parents will accept their responsibility to teach their sons and daughters individually and as a family, that they may bless their lives with the light of the gospel.

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