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## Divine Indebtedness and the Atonement

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# *Divine Indebtedness and the Atonement*

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Gerald N. Lund

The title for this paper was first suggested to me when I was invited to participate in this symposium. At first it seemed odd, a curious juxtaposition of important but unrelated ideas. As I began to reread the magnificent closing sermon of the great and righteous king Benjamin, I wondered what in those chapters had caused the committee to choose this title. After carefully reading and examining king Benjamin's closing sermon, I could not think of a title that better summarized the message of this Nephite king to his people. Because of that experience, I will use an approach similar to the one I used in my own study to present this paper, hoping to share with you what I have learned about the relationship between divine indebtedness and the Atonement. I shall examine the message of king Benjamin, look at its antecedents, outline its structure, note relationships within that structure, watch for patterns in the words and phrases he chose to use, and explore some of the implications of his address for us today. I shall let this great sermon speak for itself on the relationship between divine indebtedness and the atonement of Jesus Christ.

To understand the full impact of Benjamin's address, we must consider the setting in which it was given. Mormon, writing some four centuries after the fact, informs us about king Benjamin and the circumstances leading to his last great

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sermon (WofM 1:12–18; Mosiah 1:1–2:8). Benjamin did not inherit a comfortable situation when he became king of the Nephite nation; it was a time of war. The armies of the Lamanites came down against the Nephites, and king Benjamin led his people in battle, wielding the sword of Laban with his own hand. Thousands were killed, and eventually the Lamanites were driven out of the land (WofM 1:13–14). But this external threat to the society was not the only problem. Mormon says that the wars with the Lamanites were in addition to “contentions among [king Benjamin’s] own people.” He also explains that there were false Christs, false prophets, false preachers, and false teachers among the people. There was also “much contention and many dissensions,” and the people were described as stiffnecked (WofM 1:12, 15–17).

But Benjamin was not content with that state of affairs. With the assistance of holy prophets and through his own personal righteousness, king Benjamin brought about a complete change of heart in his people. In one single sentence Mormon summarizes Benjamin’s greatness: “King Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul . . . did once more establish peace in the land” (WofM 1:18). By peace, Mormon almost certainly means more than the absence of war.

The ultimate proof of Benjamin’s success is evident at the end of his sermon, when all of the people

had fallen to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them. And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all 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, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men. (Mosiah 4:1–2)

This is the context in which we must examine king Benjamin’s last address to his people, asking ourselves why he would choose the theme of indebtedness to God.



## A Stewardship Report (Mosiah 2:9–17)

There must have been a tremendous outpouring of love and gratitude toward king Benjamin when the people learned that he was turning the kingdom over to his son and that this would possibly be the last speech of their beloved king. Even king Benjamin seemed unprepared for the huge multitude that responded to his proclamation to come hear him. When the multitude spilled out beyond the temple courtyard, a tower was built. But even that was not sufficient; the address had to be written and distributed among the people as well (Mosiah 2:8).

As the throngs came, Benjamin surely would have been inundated with people seeking to thank him for all he had done. Praise and thanks for his goodness and greatness must have been showered upon him like a tropical downpour. Many people might be tempted in the face of such praise to say in their hearts, “Yes, you are right; I have done well.” But Benjamin would not let the credit and praise rest with himself. He epitomized the counsel of the Apostle Paul that a man ought “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (Rom 12:3). To God went the glory. These were his opening thoughts as he spoke to his people:

I have not commanded you to come up hither that ye should fear me, or that ye should think that I of myself am more than a mortal man. But I am like as yourselves, subject to all manner of infirmities in body and mind; yet I have been chosen by this people, and consecrated by my father, and was suffered by the hand of the Lord that I should be a ruler and a king over this people; and have been kept and preserved by his matchless power, to serve you with all the might, mind and strength which the Lord hath granted unto me. (Mosiah 2:10–11)

Next, he gave what might be termed a brief “stewardship report” to the people whom he had served. And what a report that was. By his own admission we learn that king Benjamin was a man of honor and justice. He did not suffer his people to be placed in prisons or to practice slavery. He saw that criminals and sinners were punished. He labored with his own



hands so that his people would not have to pay burdensome taxes (Mosiah 2:12–14). How his people must have loved him! Peace, security, honesty, justice, prosperity, and righteousness were the legacies which he left them. The long and tragic history of the world's monarchies clearly testifies that few other kings could have given similar stewardship reports at the ends of their earthly reigns.

Hastily, lest he be misunderstood, king Benjamin noted that this report was not an attempt to boast of his accomplishments, but only an acknowledgement that his service to the people was an extension of his desire to serve God (Mosiah 2:16). And then, in what is surely one of the finest, most beautiful, and most succinct lessons on Christian service ever given, he commented on the exemplary lesson of his own righteous life. If you learn anything from me, he said, learn this one lesson: “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

### Our Indebtedness to Our Heavenly King (Mosiah 2:18–26)

King Benjamin's stewardship report and the resulting lesson on service led him naturally to the concept of divine indebtedness. He had already noted that any success he had enjoyed had come only through the grace and sustaining power of God; therefore, their praise of him was misdirected. “If I, whom ye call your king,” he said, “do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King!” (Mosiah 2:19). This provides the basis for king Benjamin's concept of divine indebtedness. It is a lesson as applicable today as when it was given to the Nephites gathered in their tents in the land of Zarahemla.

A careful look at verses 20 through 25 of chapter 2 reveals the logic of king Benjamin's thoughts about our indebtedness to God. A capsulization of it into outline form looks like this:



- A. God has
  - 1. Created us (v 20)
  - 2. Kept and preserved us (v 20)
  - 3. Caused us to rejoice (v 20)
  - 4. Granted that we should have peace (v 20)
- B. He continues to
  - 1. Preserve us day to day by giving us breath (v 21)
  - 2. Allow us to live and move and do as we will (v 21)
  - 3. Support us from one moment to the next (v 21)
  - 4. Grant unto us our lives (v 23)
- C. We would still be unprofitable servants even if we should
  - 1. Render all the thanks and praise our souls possess (v 20)
  - 2. Serve him with our whole souls (v 21)
- D. All he requires is that we keep his commandments (v 22)
- E. Which if we do, he immediately blesses us (v 22)
- F. Conclusions
  - 1. We are indebted to God because
    - a. He created us and grants us life (v 23)
    - b. When we keep his commandments he blesses us more, which only increases our indebtedness (v 24)
  - 2. We cannot boast of anything (v 24)
  - 3. We are not even as much as the dust of the earth (v 25)

### *What God Has Done for His Children*

In his address, King Benjamin emphasizes various aspects of God's graciousness to his children. One aspect is the fact that God created us. King Benjamin seems to mean far more than simply the creation of our bodies; rather he seems to mean that God is responsible for the whole of creation—the heavens, the earth, and everything in them. This simple fact alone should be reason enough for our unending gratitude.

When we create something through our own labor—a work of art, a building, a piece of furniture, great music—we say it is ours. We believe we have claim upon it, stewardship over it, and the right to do with it as we wish. By this same logic we should acknowledge that because all we see and know comes from the labor of God's hands, everything is his. Therefore, whatever we have, take, use, or enjoy automatically places us in God's debt. In a revelation to the Prophet

Joseph Smith, the Lord clearly stated that this is indeed the case:

For it is expedient that I, the Lord, should make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures. I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine. (D&C 104:13–14)

Note the possessive phrases used in those verses: “which I have made,” “my very handiwork,” “all things therein are mine.” As the Psalmist said, “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps 24:1).

Think for a moment how that simple concept would alter our thinking if we would really accept it. We clutch things to our bosoms and say, “These are mine.” People rob, cheat, steal, manipulate, and maneuver so they can claim things as their own. The rich ignore the desperate sufferings of the poor because they somehow think that what they have belongs solely to them. Nations go to war over land which they did nothing to create.

If we truly believed that God owns all things and that we only use and borrow what is already his, it would vastly alter the way we approach life. A classic illustration of this principle is found in the life of Job. After facing devastating losses of family, property, and health, he states simply, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

Bishop Henry B. Eyring spoke of the natural human tendency to forget all that God has done for us:

We so easily forget that we came into life with nothing. Whatever we get soon seems our natural right, not a gift. And we forget the giver. Then our gaze shifts from what we have been given to what we don’t have yet. . . . The remembrance urged upon us by king Benjamin can be ours. Remembrance is the seed of gratitude. (12–13)



We accept daily miracles as commonplace precisely because they are daily experiences—the birth of an infant, the coming of spring, the glory of a forested mountain range, the healing processes within the human body, the never ending procession of glorious sunrises and sunsets, the infinite variety and incredible beauty of something as simple as snow flakes showering down upon the earth in countless billions. Those who try to duplicate nature in the laboratory stand in awe as they see how short they fall. The author of a December 1989 *National Geographic* article on the development of new high-tech materials discusses such mind-boggling advances as ceramic ball bearings so tough they leave dimples on an anvil when hammered by a blacksmith, yet they do not break; a metal that actually hardens as its temperature rises; cement sheets so thin and light that they are used in hang-glider fabric; plastics so flexible they can be stretched as much as 1,000 percent and grow stronger in the process! After quoting a scientist who said his goal was to develop materials which respond as nature does, the author of the article concludes: “[Their goal is to be] like nature. For materials scientists, the perfection of a tree, a bone, a spiderweb remains the distant goal” (Canby 781).

Numerous scriptures state clearly our obligation of feeling and expressing gratitude to God. Two will suffice to illustrate. In language similar to that of the Ten Commandments, the Lord says in the Doctrine and Covenants, “Thou shalt thank the Lord thy God in all things” (59:7). And then a few verses later he comments, “And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments” (59:21). In section 78 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord ties gratitude to both spiritual and temporal results: “And he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious; and the things of this earth shall be added unto him, even an hundred fold, yea, more” (v 19).

When we consider the richness of God’s creation, the inestimable abundance he gives to us so freely, his life-sustaining



power, and the continual outpouring of his blessings when we are obedient, it is not difficult to understand why king Benjamin describes our state as one of being indebted to our Heavenly Father.

Now we come to two statements in king Benjamin's address which some Latter-day Saints may find a little troubling. Unlike Calvinism and many other Christian faiths, we do not view humanity as inherently evil. A strong central concept in our theology is that we are literally the spirit children of our Heavenly Father. We speak positively about the need for self-esteem and self-reliance. We speak of our potential to become gods, a concept so bold and daring that it causes many Christians to recoil. So how do we reconcile these ideas with king Benjamin's powerful *if* statements? He says that even *if* we should render all of the praise and thanks to God of which our souls are capable, and even *if* we should serve him with our whole souls, we would still be "unprofitable servants" (Mosiah 2:20–21). Even more pointed (some might say more devastating) is his answer to his own rhetorical question, "Can you say aught of yourselves?" He replies, "Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth" (Mosiah 2:25). Let's examine these two points one at a time, for they are pivotal to our understanding of the connection between divine indebtedness and the Atonement.

### *Unprofitable Servants*

The phrase "unprofitable servants" was used by the Savior in a short parable he taught to the disciples in response to their plea, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5):

But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things



which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. (Luke 17:7–10)

In some ways, this parable is no less troublesome than king Benjamin's statement. But to better understand the concept of unprofitable servants, we must focus on the word *profit*. Profit means an increase in personal assets, status, or benefits. That is the crux of the concept of our being unprofitable servants. God is perfect in his knowledge, power, influence, and attributes. He is the Creator of all things! What could any of us—or all of us collectively—do that would bring profit (that is, an increase in assets, status, or benefits) to God?

A nineteenth-century scholar, commenting on this parable, eloquently noted that people cannot

work righteousness, in the smallest degree, beyond those powers which God has given them; and justice and equity require that they should exert those powers to the uttermost in the service of their *Maker*; and, after having acted thus, it may be justly said, *They have done only what it was their duty to do*. The nature of God is illimitable, and all the attributes of that nature are infinitely glorious: they cannot be *lessened* by the *transgressions* of his creatures, nor can they be *increased* by the uninterrupted, eternal *obedience*, and unceasing *hallelujahs*, of all the intelligent creatures that people the whole vortex of nature. When ages, beyond the power of arithmetic to sum up, have elapsed, it may be said of the most pure and perfect creatures, "Ye are unprofitable servants." Ye have derived your being from the infinite fountain of life: ye are upheld by the continued energy of the Almighty: his glories are infinite and eternal, and your obedience and services, however excellent in themselves, and profitable to *you*, have added nothing, and can add nothing, to the absolute excellencies and glories of your God. (Clarke 5:468)

That we are his children and that he loves us is undeniable. But we must rid ourselves of the notion that we can bring personal profit to God through our own actions. That would make God indebted to us, and that is unthinkable. This explains king Benjamin's ringing *ifs*: even if we were to serve him with all the power of our souls, even if we should render thanks with that same power (which very few of us, if any, ever do), we would still be unprofitable servants.



### *Less Than the Dust of the Earth*

The comment that we are even less than the dust of the earth may, on the surface, seem a little more difficult to resolve. Have we no worth at all, as this statement implies? Before answering, let us note an interesting parallel to king Benjamin's thinking. Benjamin concluded that humans are less than the dust of the earth immediately after he noted that God is the creator and sustainer of humanity. About 1,000 years earlier, the prophet Moses was caught up in heavenly vision and was shown the creation of "the world . . . and all the children of men" (Moses 1:8). Then the heavenly power withdrew and Moses was left to himself. When he recovered from the experience, his first words were, "Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed" (Moses 1:10).

Something about the majesty and infinite awesomeness of the Creation reminds both king Benjamin and Moses of humanity's puny and finite nature. But are we really less than the dust of earth? It is this "less than" concept that stings particularly. The nothingness of which Moses speaks is one thing; the worthlessness implied in Benjamin's phrase, "ye cannot say ye are even as much as the dust of the earth" (Mosiah 2:25), is quite another. Let us examine Benjamin's phrase and its subsequent uses for clues that may aid our understanding.

First of all, "dust of the earth" is a scriptural phrase that seems to imply far more than mere dirt particles. We are told, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Gen 2:7). Perhaps another word that would come close to the metaphorical meaning of *dust* would be *elements*. God certainly did not pull together a pile of mud, form it into the shape of a human being, and breathe life into it. But he did create our bodies from the elements of the earth.

King Benjamin makes a second point immediately following his "less than" statement. He reminds us that we are created of the dust of the earth, but then adds, "But behold, it belongeth



to him who created you” (Mosiah 2:25). This is a simple, but profound line of reasoning:

1. God created all things, including the dust (or elements) of the earth
2. We are made of those elements
3. Therefore, our bodies belong to God

Yet this still doesn't completely clarify king Benjamin's comment that we are not “even as much as the dust of the earth.” We can easily acknowledge that we are made of earthly elements, but king Benjamin says far more than that. He says we are not “even as much as” those elements. Why? Are we truly so worthless? Mormon gives us the clues that help us better understand king Benjamin's statement. We will examine two of Mormon's statements, one made immediately following king Benjamin's address, and one made later in the Book of Mormon.

King Benjamin's words, as well as the angel's message which the king delivered, had such a powerful effect on the people that they fell to the ground. Regarding the people's reaction, Mormon comments, “And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth” (Mosiah 4:2). What a significant clue! It is the carnal or natural man that is less than the dust of the earth. Thus, one of the first things Benjamin says as he continues his address is that the people had been awakened to a sense of “[their] own nothingness, and [their] worthless and fallen state” (Mosiah 4:5). Again, our worthlessness is mentioned in connection with our fallen state.

Interestingly, king Benjamin says a lack of humility (or not remembering our own nothingness) leads us to a state of being called “the natural man,” a state in which one becomes “an enemy to God” (Mosiah 2:37; 3:19). In a similar vein, President Benson defines pride as enmity toward God:

The central feature of pride is enmity—enmity toward God and enmity toward our fellowmen. Enmity means “hatred toward,



hostility to, or a state of opposition.” It is the power by which Satan wishes to reign over us. Pride is essentially competitive in nature. We pit our will against God’s. (“Beware of Pride” 4)

This leads us to Mormon’s later explanation of why we are less than the dust of the earth:

Yea, how quick [are people] to be lifted up in pride; yea, how quick to boast, and do all manner of that which is iniquity; and how slow are they to remember the Lord their God, and to give ear unto his counsels, yea, how slow to walk in wisdom’s paths! Behold, they do not desire that the Lord their God, who hath created them, should rule and reign over them; notwithstanding his great goodness and his mercy towards them, they do set at naught his counsels, and they will not that he should be their guide. O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; yea, even they are less than the dust of the earth. For behold, the dust of the earth moveth hither and thither, to the dividing asunder, at the command of our great and everlasting God. (Hel 12:5–8)

This is the key. King Benjamin said that all God asks of us as payment for our debt to him is our obedience. But natural or fallen individuals are by nature disobedient. Even the elements of the earth respond to God’s voice, but fallen individuals do not. They persist in their sinful ways, ignoring God’s goodness to them and their own indebted state, and, therefore, are even less than the dust of the earth.

### Indebtedness and the Atonement (Mosiah 2:26–3:27)

I began this paper by noting that the juxtaposition of indebtedness and the Atonement seemed a little odd at first. Having examined the concept of our nothingness and our being less than the dust of the earth, we can now see how Benjamin makes indebtedness and the Atonement interdependent.

Earlier, I outlined the logical organization of king Benjamin’s comments on divine indebtedness. I will now summarize that portion of his address in one sentence (A) and then continue the outline to show how indebtedness relates to the Atonement.

- A. King Benjamin asserts that humanity alone is nothing; therefore, we are indebted to God, though all God requires for payment of our indebtedness is our obedience (2:19–25)
- B. King Benjamin discharges his obligation and warns against disobedience (2:26–41)
  - 1. He gives a charge to keep the commandments under the new king (2:31)
  - 2. He commands us to avoid obeying evil spirits (2:32–35)
    - a. Those who sin and die in their sins are damned, a just wage for transgressing knowingly (2:33)
    - b. All have been taught how to avoid evil by the prophets and the scriptures—yet another reason for our indebtedness to God (2:34–35)
  - 3. He states that those who knowingly transgress (2:36–39)
    - a. Withdraw from the Spirit (2:36)
    - b. Receive no guidance on life’s path (2:36)
    - c. Become enemies to God—that is, natural men (2:37)
    - d. Have no place for the Lord (2:37)
    - e. Will experience guilt, shame, pain, and torment unless they repent (2:38–39)
  - 4. He calls on all to consider the two choices (2:40–41)
    - a. The awful state of those who transgress (2:40)
    - b. The blessed and happy state (temporal and spiritual) of the obedient (2:41)
- C. King Benjamin delivers the angel’s message (3:1–27)
  - 1. He prophesies of Christ (3:1–11)
    - a. God will come to the earth and minister to humanity (3:5–8)
    - b. He will be crucified and resurrected (3:9–10)
    - c. His blood will atone for those who ignorantly sin (3:11)
    - d. His blood will not atone for those who knowingly sin and remain unrepentant (3:12–13)
  - 2. He teaches the relationship between the law of Moses and the Atonement (3:14–15)
    - a. The law of Moses was given because of the hardness of Israel’s hearts (3:14)
    - b. The law of Moses pointed to Christ (3:15)
    - c. The law of Moses had no power to save without the Atonement (3:15)
  - 3. He teaches and testifies of Christ and the Atonement (3:16–23)
    - a. Little children are saved unconditionally through the Atonement (3:16)



- b. There are no other means of salvation but through Christ (3:17)
- c. People are damned unless they become as children and believe in Christ (3:18)
- d. The natural man is an enemy to God and will be unless he (3:19)
  - i. Yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit
  - ii. Puts off the natural man
  - iii. Becomes a saint through the Atonement
  - iv. Becomes as a child
- 4. He teaches consequences of the Atonement (3:20–27)
  - a. When knowledge of the Atonement spreads, none will be blameless but children (3:20–21)
  - b. Those who reject Christ’s words are damned, and their punishments are just (3:23–27)

With this outline we clearly see that once Benjamin establishes the concept of divine indebtedness, he moves immediately to disobedience (the ultimate proof of our ingratitude) and its consequences. From there he logically turns to the only cure for those consequences—the Atonement.

### *The Atonement of Christ*

Benjamin’s discussion of our indebtedness and worthlessness naturally leads him directly to a discussion of the Atonement and of the concept of grace, though king Benjamin never uses the word *grace* itself. The LDS Bible Dictionary defines *grace* as the “divine means of help or strength given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ. . . . This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts.”

Note that last phrase. It is another way of saying exactly what king Benjamin was saying, namely, that even if we thank God with all our souls, even if we serve him our whole lives (another way to describe “best efforts”) we would still be unprofitable servants. There must be a source of help, some “enabling power” that lifts us out of our utter helplessness and

helps us overcome our carnal and fallen nature so that we may become the sons and daughters of God.

As the angel explained to Benjamin, without Christ and his saving power we are damned: we are destined to remain in our fallen, natural state as enemies to God. But through God's grace, his enabling power, we can put off the natural man and become saints, sanctified and holy, and thus return to God's presence. Thus the concepts of indebtedness and atonement are inextricably interwoven in king Benjamin's thinking. The Atonement is both another reason for our indebtedness and the means by which we escape from its effects.

### Obtaining and Retaining a Remission of Sins (Mosiah 4:1–30)

The concepts of indebtedness and atonement are in some ways one. And, as taught by king Benjamin, they had a tremendous impact on the people. They cried for mercy and asked that the atoning blood of Christ be applied in their behalf so their sins could be forgiven (v 2). Their request was granted, and Mormon tells us that they received a remission of their sins (v 3).

Filled with joy at his people's repentance, king Benjamin returned to his initial theme and taught them how to retain the remission of sins they had just experienced. And here, as in the first part of his address, the concept of indebtedness still heavily flavors his thinking. Note his reasoning:

1. The knowledge of God has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness and your fallen state (v 5)
2. A knowledge of God's goodness and of the Atonement brings salvation to those who (v 6)
  - a. Trust in God
  - b. Are diligent in keeping the commandments
  - c. Continue in faith to the end
3. These are they who receive salvation (v 7)
4. There is no other way to receive salvation (v 8)
5. We retain a remission of sins by remembering God's goodness and our own nothingness and unworthiness (v 11)



6. This remembrance will influence all we do and lead us to eternal life (vv 12–30)

Thus the key to the whole process of salvation is remembering, and the primary focus of our remembrance is (1) God's goodness and greatness, (2) our own nothingness, and (3) God's greatest gift, Jesus Christ, through whom we can be saved.

## Conclusion: Remembrance, the Key to Salvation

President Ezra Taft Benson has said:

The Prophet Joseph said at one time that one of the greatest sins of which the Latter-day Saints would be guilty is the sin of ingratitude. I presume most of us have not thought of that as a great sin. There is a great tendency for us in our prayers and in our pleadings with the Lord to ask for additional blessings. But sometimes I feel we need to devote more of our prayers to expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving for blessings already received. We enjoy so much. Of course we need daily blessings of the Lord, but if we sin in the matter of prayer, I think it is in the lack of our expressions of thanksgiving, for blessings that we receive daily. (*God, Family, Country* 199)

Gratitude is a simple thing; perhaps that is why so many easily overlook it. But in the matchless address of the humble, righteous king Benjamin we are taught that profound consequences can result from gratitude or the lack of it. It was not a sense of hopelessness king Benjamin sought to invoke when he noted that we are less than the dust of the earth. It was a sense of humility, and more especially, a sense of our utter and total dependence upon God for all that we have, all that we are, and all that we can be—a sense of the relationship between divine indebtedness and the Atonement.

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