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The Book of Mormon is Relevant Today: Milestones for Me

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MILESTONES FOR ME

(ANOTHER DIMENSION OF THE RELEVANCY OF THE BOOK OF MORMON)

by Neal A. Maxwell

Each of us needs to be able to measure his personal progress against some unchanging standards if he is serious about pursuing the path of the Master—however glacial the pace may seem. The Book of Mormon provides milestones for the modern Mormon in a variety of ways—milestones that will have a different relevance for each of us.

Checkbook Christians

Jacob urges each of us: "Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and *be familiar with all* and free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you." (Jacob 2:17.) The principle of imparting of our "substance" after we know what others specifically need is a concept that ought to be operative in our lives today. Nor is our substance limited to material goods. Others often need fellowship more than food, rapport with another human more than raiment.

The size and specialization of our social environment today often result in our touching others without feeling them, knowing others as functions rather than as humans. Ours is an environment in which indifference is institutionalized, and in which it is easy to fulfill one of Moroni's prophecies about our times when he said that we would let those with obvious needs "pass by you, *and notice them not.*" (Mormon 8:39.) It is a special challenge for a Mormon in megalopolis to "*notice*" his brothers and to be "*familiar*" with their needs. We have so often depersonalized our assistance to others that we might

For Course 12, lessons 14 to 16 (December 27 to January 10), "The Importance of Righteous Desire," "King Benjamin, a Man of Humility and Sincerity," and "The Mission of Jesus Christ—A Message to King Benjamin"; for Course 14, lessons 7 and 16 (November 1, January 24), "God's Character" and "Other Scriptures"; for Course 16, lessons 14 and 15 (December 27, January 3), "Father's Concern for Man's Joy"; for Course 18, lesson 18 (January 31); "The Kingdom First"; for Course 26, lessons 17 and 27 (November 29, January 31), "Learning to Love" and "How We Look at Others"; for Course 28, lesson 18 (January 24), "Respect for Holy Law"; to support family home evening lessons 17 and 27; and of general interest.

be called "checkbook Christians." Through our taxes and offerings we can unintentionally move away from the personal acts of brotherhood which Jacob and Mormon prescribed.

We can also model after the works of our predecessors who at one stage were accurately described as "... distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men" and as "perfectly honest and upright in all things." (Alma 27:27.)

Our capacity to develop empathy which leads to action can be measured, in part, by the lofty standards advanced in the Nephite scriptures, which prescribe a high level of integrity in our interpersonal relations.

Our Prayers

The Book of Mormon perceptively reminds us that even our prayers to God for help in striving to do better are, in a sense, self-serving, for God does not need to be flattered; he does not need information from us; we need his help in raising our performance level. Nephi urges us as follows:

"... Ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance *unto thee*, that thy performance may be for the welfare of *thy soul*. (2 Nephi 32:9.) Properly motivated, prayerfully prepared, we are blessed by our "performance." Of a truth, when we do as God commands, "he doth immediately bless" us. (Mosiah 2:24.) While we do not receive blessings except by obedience to God's laws, his ratio of rewards to obedience is clearly a generous one.

A Loving Father

Our God is a loving Father who desires our happiness. He is not some distant force in the universe

who desires us to be forever "jumping hurdles" merely to please and to amuse him. He is a teacher as well as a loving Father who desires us to draw closer to him with our every act and thought—if we but will. In a way, the characterization of the Father's voice as he introduced his son Jesus Christ to the Nephite multitude is very significant. God's voice was described as "not a harsh voice, neither . . . a loud voice," but one which "did pierce them that did hear to the center . . . to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn." This is an omnipotent but caring and loving Father introducing his Son whom he loves to his other children whom he also loves. By studying the ways Nephite prophets developed a personal relationship with God, we too can draw closer to God—forming a personal relationship with our Father that transcends in integrity and richness our relationship with our fellowmen.

Keeping Our Testimonies Alive

Life with its ironies and stress, the standards of the Church, the evaluations we sometimes receive—all combine to provide for each of us ample feedback on our failures and multiple chances to learn. When we are guilty of error, we will feel pain: "Wherefore, the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center." (1 Nephi 16:2.) How we cope with those cuts to "the very center" of our self-esteem is one way of telling how well we are doing. "He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding." (Proverbs 15:32.)

Those who have planted the seed of the gospel and have worked to grow a tree of testimony often neglect to nourish that tree. We do this at our peril, for "when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it," we may "pluck it up and cast it out," thinking the tree has no value. (See Alma 32:38.) Each of us will have our own experiences that will constitute the coming of "the heat of the sun," and these ex-

periences will most likely come to us when we least want them or are least prepared!

The gospel has a rolling relevancy to life if we search the scriptures regularly. Unstudied, unapplied, and dormant doctrines will seem to wither and shrink in importance and relevance, but this is the atrophy that precedes indifference or apostasy. Keeping the tree of testimony alive, according to Alma, requires "faith . . . diligence . . . patience, and long suffering." (See Alma 32:43.) For those of us who have been blessed with testimonies, King Benjamin sums it up well in terms of what we must do to "retain in remembrance the greatness of God," and promises us that if we do these things:

1. We will grow in the knowledge of God and of "that which is just and true."

2. We will not be inclined to injure others but "to live peaceably and render to every man . . . his due."

3. We will care for our children and teach them "to love one another, and to serve one another."

4. We will succor those who need us, including the poor, administering our substance accordingly. (See Mosiah 4:11-16.)

In conclusion, what could be more relevant than a gospel whose consequences are:

1. *An understanding of God and man,*
2. *justice and truth,*
3. *peace,*
4. *love and service to others, including a response to poverty,*
5. *and happy homes?*

Little wonder then that it is said of Jesus that he "advocateth the cause of the children of men." (Moroni 7:28.) He is the only real and perfect friend mankind has!

I so testify humbly and in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Library File Reference: BOOK OF MORMON—TEACHINGS; CHARITY; TESTIMONY.

WE ARE ALL HIS CHILDREN (Concluded from page 403.)

ascending the mountain. But until then, you will continue to wonder if you are white or Indian.

JOHN:

My Grandfather, I do not know what to say. I feel so . . . so . . . somehow clean inside, and outside I feel as if I were standing under a glacier-fed waterfall on the mountain where you were. But in my mind and heart I am hot, I am burning. I feel

as though I was there on that mountain long ago with you. What does youth say when it sees the great things age has given? I feel I should be silent for a thousand years. But at the same time I want to shout from the mountaintop that I am born again; that I see life all new and fresh; that perhaps I am even becoming a man—a son of God.

Library File Reference: AMERICAN INDIANS; BROTHERHOOD; PERSONALITY.