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In the Service of Our Fellow Beings

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William A. Wilson

The Book of Mosiah deserves a close reading, but the first time through one should read it without stopping so the subplots in this convoluted narrative can fall into some sort of coherent whole. King Benjamin's powerful sermon at the beginning of Mosiah actually occurs after many of the other events in the book have already taken place. Other elements of the story which need to be pieced together by an attentive reader include the abandonment of the land of Lehi-Nephi by the Nephites, who found the city of Zarahemla; the departure of Ammon and his followers to find Zeniff and his people, who had left Zarahemla years earlier to re-claim their inheritance in Lehi-Nephi; Ammon's discovery that Zeniff's people are in bondage to the Lamanites and their subsequent escape to Zarahemla; the story of King Noah, Zeniff's evil son, and the king's wicked priests, whom the heroic Abinadi faces down at the cost of his life; the story of Gideon, the brave and wise counselor to Noah's son, King Limhi; the conversion of Alma and his followers and their baptism at the Waters of Mormon; the deliverance of these people from Lamanite bondage and return to Zarahemla; the discovery by King Limhi's subjects of a set of plates recounting the coming to the New World of a people who had left the old world at the confusion of tongues, a story preserved for us in

the Book of Ether; the merger of the Mulekites and Nephites into one people; the rebellion of Alma the younger and four sons of Mosiah and their remarkable conversion; the end of the reign of the kings in favor of judges; and finally the deaths of Mosiah and Alma.

When Eugene England asked me to write an essay on the Book of Mosiah, a recurring image from my early youth flashed through my mind, with the result that only one of these many narratives caught my fancy, King Benjamin's mighty sermon. From 1935 to 1939 my family lived in a spot on the road called Dell, Montana, with a population of twenty. We attended the local LDS branch, shopped, attended an occasional movie, and visited my parents' friends in a little larger spot on the road, Lima, eight miles south. These were deep Depression years. We had no electricity; our potable water had to be brought in by railroad car. My mother's best friend lived in a log home with a dirt roof and a dirt floor. These circumstances did not trouble my young mind. My father had a job. We had a roof over our heads, coal for our stove, ice for our ice box, and food enough to eat. What else did we need?

One day while we were shopping for groceries in Lima, a car like nothing I had ever seen before stopped in front of the store. Mattresses, chairs, and other household goods were strapped precariously to its roof and trunk and a haggard couple and their many children were crammed into the interior. Not until years later, when I had seen the film version of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, did I realize what we had seen that day: a family of refugees from the dust bowl looking for work. The family came into the store, and the fa-

ther searched through his meager supply of coins for money enough to buy a few staples; the children all the while stared hungrily at the supply of sweets in the candy counter. The family left, the children disappointed that their father could buy them none of these delicacies. Then my own father began looking through his purse and found enough money to buy a sack full of sweets along with some regular groceries. We overtook the car, flagged it down, and Dad began distributing the sweets to the children, who grabbed and devoured them immediately, more like savages than human beings. I was only about four years old and today can remember little of my early years, but the image of those gaunt children, their bony arms protruding from ragged clothing, their fists ferociously clutching for the candy, has never left me. I can see it all as though it had happened yesterday.

As I thought of King Benjamin's sermon, the image of those grasping fingers and of King Benjamin's admonition to "impart of your substance" to those in need seemed the proper focus for my essay. The more carefully I have read Mosiah, however, the more I have realized that my experience has, or can have, a far deeper metaphorical significance than I had realized. Clearly, King Benjamin taught of our obligation to help the poor in a way that should make us all feel guilty, but he also taught us to feed our brothers and sisters spiritually, to make them aware of the Savior's love for us and of his atoning sacrifice. After carefully focusing on the entire Book of Mosiah, I now see in my Montana experience what I had not seen clearly before—not only the outstretched arms of the children but also the hands of my generous father reaching out to feed them. I recognize in the ac-

tion of my earthly father a type and shadow of the merciful love of our heavenly father in providing what we cannot provide for ourselves, and an example of how to reach toward those outstretched hungry hands to relieve a physical or spiritual hunger which our brothers and sisters may not be able to satisfy without our help.

These and other principles in the Book of Mosiah are made concrete in the lives of the book's cast of characters, only some of whom I can treat here. Abinadi is one of my favorites for sheer boldness in proclaiming the gospel and declaring the dreadful consequences that fall upon those who fail to live its teachings. Few can match Abinadi's courage and forthrightness. Following King Zeniff's death, his wicked son, Noah, ascends to the throne and soon corrupts the kingdom, setting his heart upon riches and upon what money could buy—many wives and concubines—and replacing Zeniff's righteous priests with others as lascivious as himself. He causes "his people to commit sin, and do that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord." Somehow, from the midst of these people, Abinadi steps forward, breathing fire like an Old Testament prophet and warning the people that unless they repent they will suffer the wrath of God and be taken into bondage by the Lamanites. To Noah, he declares: "If ye teach the law of Moses, why do ye not keep it? Why do ye set your hearts upon riches? Why do ye commit whoredoms, and spend your strength with harlots, yea, and cause this people to commit sin?" I have often wondered what circumstances in the middle of all this unrighteousness produced Abinadi and from whom he received the gospel message which he taught so powerfully,

but the record is silent on this subject. Nonetheless, when Noah's priests challenge him, he responds by proclaiming that "salvation doth not come by the law alone: and were it not for the atonement which God himself shall make for the sins and the iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish." He taught them of the Savior's coming crucifixion and resurrection. He taught them that when the Savior broke the bands of death, the result would be universal—that all humankind would rise from the grave—but that the results of the atonement would be conditional, fully efficacious only for those who accepted, loved, and followed him. Finally, in spite of his harsh condemnation of Noah and his priests, Abinadi taught that if they would repent, God, full of mercy and compassion, would reach out his hands to theirs and stand between "them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions; having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice." Those who accept the Lord, said Abinadi, are his seed, "the heirs of the kingdom of God: for these are they whose sins he has borne."

Sometimes we think of the atonement primarily as something that will get us safely into the heavenly kingdom. But if I learned anything as a BYU bishop, it was that the atonement eases our burdens and makes us happy in this life as well. In fact, if it cannot make us happy here, I doubt it would make us happy in the hereafter. A number of times young people, downcast and convinced they had lost all hope, came in to see me. After we reviewed the teachings of Abinadi, Alma, and Benjamin, they left the office floating on air, realizing that the road ahead might still be hard but that

the pathway to forgiveness was open. I recall a beautiful young woman, tears flowing, convinced that her life was pretty much over. We read the scriptures together, she turned her life around, and she later received a mission call. I will have lunch this week with a friend of over fifty years. Some years ago he got into trouble and was excommunicated. He also got himself turned around, was re-baptized, and will soon leave with his wife on a mission. The atonement is for this life.

As Abinadi spoke boldly to King Noah, the king trembled but did not repent. He ordered Abinadi put to death by fire. But, like a Shakespearean hero, Abinadi cannot be silenced until he has said: "I finish my message; and then it matters not whither I go, if it so be that I am saved." When the weak-spined Noah, fearing God's retribution, promises not to put Abinadi to death if he will take back his words, Abinadi replies, "I say unto you, I will not recall the words which I have spoken unto you. . . . Yea, and I will suffer even until death, and I will not recall my words, and they shall stand as a testimony against you." As he was being consumed by fire, he cried out, "O God, receive my soul." As I re-read these words, my heart goes out to this noble man.

When I think of Abinadi, I think of eight-year-old Martti Kerttula, whom I met in the town of Pori, Finland, after I had begun my mission in 1953. Martti's family was among the first to join the LDS Church after the Finnish mission was opened in 1947. As a result of unrelenting condemnation of the Latter-day Saints by a local Pori priest, hostility toward the church was often severe, especially in schools. One day Martti's school teacher asked if anyone in the class

would like to sing a song. Martti volunteered, stood before his class, and belted out “A Mormon Boy.” Martti did not, of course, have Abinadi’s sophisticated knowledge of the gospel message, but he knew that his family had embraced this message and understood, however incompletely, its importance. He knew also what his teacher and his classmates most likely thought of Mormons. With great courage he sang: “A Mormon boy, a Mormon boy, I am a Mormon boy. / I could be envied by a king, for I am a Mormon boy.” I hope one day to have the courage of Abinadi and Martti, the courage to proclaim and defend the right at all times, in all places, and among all people.

Among the people who heard Abinadi speak, only one heeded his words, a young man named Alma, another of my heroes. Alma wrote down the words he heard, repented of his sins, and then, having fled from Noah after trying to save Abinadi, taught Abinadi’s words privately to other people. Many believed. Alma and these newly converted Nephites gathered in secret at a place called Mormon, where there was a fountain of pure water. What followed was one of the most poignant events in the Book of Mormon. Moving beyond Abinadi’s sermon, Alma was inspired by this pure water to teach the importance of baptism, preceded not only by faith but by a willingness to love others. He said that those ready to be brought into the fold as Christ’s people are those “willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times, and in all things, and in all places.” These words recall the instructions given to Jo-

seph Smith in organizing the First Presidency: “Succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (Doctrine and Covenants 81:5). Just as Christ, through his atonement and resurrection, has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves, he clearly expects us to do for our brothers and sisters what they are unable to do for themselves. Thus, he makes our willingness to do this a prerequisite to taking on his name through baptism.

A few years ago, as I wrote an essay on a related topic, I asked Eugene England if he could give me an example of someone bearing someone else’s burdens. In response, he wrote:

When we moved here, our neighbor, Hyrum Babcock, was in the late stages of multiple sclerosis. Our priesthood quorum organized itself to care for him. Each day one of us would read to him for a few hours, and each night one of us would help him bathe. A member had built a motorized sling to lift him from his wheelchair into the tub, which a single person could operate with a little training, and that is what we used so he could have a full body bath each day, which helped immensely in avoiding bedsores. This went on for about five years until he died.

My wife, Hannele, was born and raised in Finland. During Finland’s two wars with the Soviet Union, from 1939-1945, generous Swedes, moved by what seemed the impending destruction of Finland, opened their homes and hearts to thousands of Finnish children, some seventy thousand of them. During the last year of World War II, 1944-45, when it seemed certain that the Soviets would overrun the country, Finnish parents sent thirty thousand of their young to Swe-

den. Hannele was one of them. Years later when she asked her mother how she could send her eight-year-old daughter away, her mother responded, “We wanted one of our family to survive.” Miraculously Finland survived also, and Hannele was able to return home. But her life was forever changed by the kindness and love of the family who, with no thought of the cost to themselves, took in this little waif. The closeness and love of that family have continued to the present. Shortly before Hannele’s “Swedish grandmother” died, she wrote to tell Hannele what a great blessing it had been to have her in their lives. No thought here whatsoever of any sacrifice or discomfort or burden—just gratitude and love unfeigned.

Bearing one another’s burdens need not be quite so dramatic. All of us are surrounded each day by opportunities to help others if we only keep our eyes open. A few years ago Hannele underwent neck surgery, which took her out of circulation for several months. One day her visiting teaching companion burst through our door carrying a bucket, rags, and cleaning fluids. She exclaimed: “I’ve come to clean your bathroom. Husbands may help in other ways, but they are no good at cleaning bathrooms.” She went to work and left behind a spotless bathroom and a grateful Hannele and husband. In Finland, as Hannele’s mother grew older, she had to depend more and more on the support of others. One of her faithful home teachers gathered her and a blind widow living close by and took them to church each Sunday, thus providing the only means they had of escaping the confinement of their homes and satisfying their spiritual hunger. After every snowstorm, someone cleared the walkway at

Hannele's mother's home. During a mid-winter visit, Hannele discovered one morning that the secret snow shoveler was her mother's other home teacher. This good brother, a man of meager means, delivered newspapers each morning and then made his way across town by bicycle if it had snowed. If Hannele had not caught him in the act, he never would have been found out.

Once Alma had explained the prerequisites for baptism, his followers joyfully expressed their willingness to meet them. Then, having received authority directly from the Spirit of the Lord coming "upon him," rather than through the laying on of hands, Alma immersed both himself and one of these followers, Helam, into the water. Afterward he baptized about two hundred souls. He ordained priests to teach the concepts of the kingdom of God. And he commanded them to teach without contention and with "their hearts knit together in unity and in love, one towards another." Abinadi had warned the people against having their hearts set on riches, but Alma now taught that they should use their riches to help the less fortunate. He "commanded that the people of the Church should impart of their substance, every one according to that which he hath; if he have more abundantly, he should impart more abundantly; and he that had but little, but little should be required." They should "impart of their substance" to those priests who needed support but also "to every needy, naked soul." It would be a mistake to assume that only those needing material support were "needy souls" (more on this later). Bearing each other's burdens and mourning with those who mourn meant then, and means now, far more than reaching into

our pocketbooks to give financial assistance. The examples given above should make this clear. Alma's followers certainly understood this principle, for "they did walk uprightly before God, imparting to one another, both temporally and spiritually, according to their needs and their wants."

Following King Noah's overthrow and death by fire, which mirrored Abinadi's death, Noah's son Limhi, a just man, "having the kingdom conferred upon him by the people," spent much of his life in warfare trying to protect his people from the Lamanites, to whom they were in bondage. Defeat followed defeat, the Lord being slow to forgive the Nephites their earlier transgressions, until they were brought down to the earth in humility. Those of us today who revel in the "shock and awe" power of our armies and glory in our battlefield victories should remember that there is never glory in war, in the violent destruction of fellow human beings, and that innocent lives on all sides will always be torn apart by sabers or by smart bombs. Both Nephites and Lamanites witnessed the slaughter of their brave warriors. We would do well to remember that, as in Limhi's time, there will always be "mourning and lamentation": "the widow mourning for her husband; the son and the daughter mourning for their father; and the brothers for their brethren." And we should pray for the wisdom to resolve our differences without violence.

Eventually Limhi and his people, guided by Ammon and assisted by Gideon, who got the Lamanite guards drunk, fled from captivity and made their way to Zarahemla. About a year later, Alma and his followers, having similarly suffered under the Lamanites, abandoned their city and also made

their way to Zarahemla. About four years before this happy reunion took place, King Benjamin was nearing the end of his life and gathered his people together to give them his final words. His address constitutes a core sermon in the Book of Mormon—a sermon that leaves me weak in the knees realizing how far short I come in measuring up to Benjamin’s admonitions.

As he rose to speak, King Benjamin surely had in mind what Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob had said on the subject he was about to address, but he also knew that his people were quick to forget. He approached his theme, therefore, almost as though speaking of it for the first time. He had not, of course, heard Abinadi’s discourse before King Noah or Alma’s instruction to his people to bear each other’s burdens. Nevertheless, he brought together into a unified whole the essential points of both these men—Abinadi’s focus on the atonement and Alma’s focus on serving others.

King Benjamin began by reminding his subjects that in serving them to the best of his ability as their king, he had “only been in the service of God,” then said he hoped they would learn also “that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.” This statement is, in my judgment, the key to understanding Benjamin’s entire sermon and, indeed, in properly understanding much of the Book of Mormon.

Not much of an ego builder, the king reminded his listeners that they could serve the Lord with all their souls and still be “unprofitable servants” and that they were not “even as much as the dust of the earth.” He encouraged them to remember always “the greatness of God” and their own “noth-

ingness.” He did so, I believe, to help them better comprehend and feel in their bones the great love and mercy of a perfect God willing to come to earth and sacrifice for them in their “worthless and fallen state,” willing to become mortal and shed his own blood if they would repent, and thus save them in the kingdom of God. As Abinadi had said to King Noah, King Benjamin told his people “that the law of Moses availeth nothing, except it were through the atonement of his [Christ’s] blood.” He told them how Christ would suffer, blood coming from every pore “for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.” Again and again he assured them that “salvation cometh to none such, except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord.” “And moreover, I say unto you,” he said, “that there shall be no other name given, nor no other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.” Little wonder that the people cried out for mercy, like some of the people I saw as a bishop, and rejoiced when the Spirit of the Lord filled their hearts and testified that their sins had been forgiven.

But Benjamin was not through. What he was to say in the second part of his sermon is systemically related to what he had said in the first, inseparably linking the atonement of Christ to the requirement expounded by Alma that we serve our fellow beings. He counseled those who had received a remission of their sins and a fullness of joy not to become lax but to call on the Lord daily to remain steadfast in the faith. “If ye do this,” he said, certain circumstances would follow which would stand as evidence of their faithfulness, without which they could not claim to be redeemed. He enumerated

these circumstances: First, “ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God”; second, “ye will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably”; third, “ye will not suffer your children, that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God”; fourth, and perhaps most difficult, “ye yourselves will succor those that stand in need of your succor; ye will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish.”

Anticipating the objection some might raise to this last requirement, Benjamin countered: “Perhaps thou shalt say, The man hath brought upon himself his misery, therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance, that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just.” He called such naysayers to repentance, pointing out that we are all beggars, depending upon God for all our substance, and reminding them that their possessions belonged to God, not to them. If the people, in their worthless and fallen state, in their being less than the dust of the earth, had been redeemed by the suffering and atoning sacrifice of a merciful and loving God, “O then,” cried King Benjamin, “how had ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have, one to another?” To make sure his people could not possibly misunderstand that for the atonement to be efficacious in their lives they must sacrifice themselves to assist others, he added that *“for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God, I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that*

which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants.” These words, reminiscent of Alma’s, reminded the people of their double duty to serve each other both materially and spiritually. Thus, like the followers of Alma, in doing so they would become “the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters.”

Having grown old, Benjamin relinquished the throne to his son, Mosiah, and died three years later, but his words echo throughout the Book of Mormon and down through the years into our own hearts and minds, reminding us of our duty to serve God by serving our fellow beings. The second Mosiah, like his father, became a good king because he did not set his heart on “that lucre which doth corrupt the soul.” It is heart-breaking to read through the Book of Mormon as the people time and again ignore the teaching of King Benjamin and fail to share their good fortune with their brothers and sisters. They become prideful, divided into classes, and eventually wicked in ignoring God’s counsel. In instance after instance, the people lose their way. Had they wanted to retain a remission of their sins and walk guiltless before God, they would have had to follow King Benjamin’s teachings; but they could not bring themselves to do so.

I said at the outset that King Benjamin makes me uncomfortable as I measure myself against the standards he sets. His sermon and similar warnings throughout the Book of Mormon are a guide for us today, as Mormon made clear in addressing us directly:

I speak to unto you as if ye were present ... Jesus Christ hath

shewn you unto me, and I know your doing; ... For behold, ye do love money, and your substances, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick, and the afflicted. ... Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick, and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not?

On a rainy night some years ago, my family and I spent the night at my parents' home in Downey, Idaho, before setting out on a long-anticipated vacation to Yellowstone National Park. I took my two daughters swimming at Downatta Hot Springs, three miles south of Downey. After we got out of the pool and were eating hamburgers, a very tired-looking man approached me and asked if we would give him a ride to town. He was trying to get to Oregon where he had a job waiting. His family had gone on ahead, but lacking funds to pay his own trip, he was trying to hitchhike in time to begin the job. He had gotten few rides, had walked many miles that day, and was about worn out. Normally I would not have endangered my daughters' safety by picking up a hitchhiker, but something told me that this man was OK. I knew that his chances of getting a ride in Downey, which was deserted at that time of night, were about nil. So I drove him sixteen miles up the road to McCammon and the truck-stop café at the junction of US Highways 30, 91, and 191. "You'll stand a better chance of getting a ride here," I told him as I let him out into the chilly night air. It had started to rain. I pulled out my wallet and gave him five dollars. He thanked me profusely. We headed back to Downey.

I later related this incident in a priesthood meeting and

asked what I should have done. The majority thought what I did was sufficient. A few thought I had done more than enough. A few felt I could have taken the hitchhiker to my parents' home, had my mother fix him a good meal, put him up for the night, and then put him on a bus to Oregon. My father would not have objected to any of this. Just as he had reached out to the dust bowl refugees, he would have reached out to this man. In the dark days of the Great Depression, he had enough seniority to hang onto his job as a railroad section hand. He voluntarily let another man work half his shifts so the man could feed his family, and Dad went door to door selling Watkins' products to make up the salary loss. A few years later, he stumbled upon a man lying drunk in his vomit. Dad picked him up, cleaned him up, took him to a nearby hotel, and put him to bed. The Good Samaritan would have taken proper care of the hitchhiker just as Dad did. When presented with a similar opportunity, I did not. I could not get out of my head thoughts of the hindrance to our planned vacation helping this weary stranger would have meant. I am still haunted by thoughts of this man eager to get to his family and a job, heading out into a cold and wet Idaho night in search of a ride.

I am not, I believe, the only one who falls short of King Benjamin's challenge. Materialism is alive and well. Too often we are not only in the world but of the world, engaging in conspicuous consumption and adorning ourselves with symbols of prosperity that have no life. Too often I have heard some of my associates attempt to explain away King Benjamin's commandment to share our wealth. Again, it is difficult for me to throw stones since I fall so far short of

King Benjamin's mark myself. I told Hannele recently I was going to quit praying for the poor because it seemed hypocritical to pray for them and do nothing to ease their distress.

The beggars who petition us for assistance are not only stranded hitchhikers or individuals standing at the entrances of supermarket driveways with signs around their necks saying they are hungry and asking for handouts. They are those throughout the world who go to bed hungry. They are faceless people who pass by us unseen. They are the homeless, sleeping through cold winter nights under bridges and viaducts. They are men, women, and children whose lives have been shattered by mindless wars. They are those who die needlessly because they cannot pay for adequate medical care. The LDS Church has done a wonderful thing recently in setting up a Perpetual Education Fund for the disadvantaged in third-world countries, but in our own communities children are forced into overcrowded classrooms with outdated textbooks because we will not properly support education. Many no longer enjoy the privilege of attending college because they are unable to pay the rising tuition costs. Have we any obligation to improve their chances for learning so we can avoid being distinguished by status and rank? If we take literally King Benjamin's exhortation, we have an obligation to reach out our helping hands wherever misery or suffering exists in the world. The way we choose to do so depends upon us individually and perhaps collectively; but in either case we cannot sit passively on the sidelines and expect others to meet our obligations for us, not according to King Benjamin, not if we want to claim an interest in the Kingdom of God.

King Benjamin provided a handy out for some of us who want to cling to our possessions. If we have sufficient to “remain from day to day” but not enough to help the needy, then we are freed from the obligation of helping others—but only as long as we can say in our hearts, “I give not because I have not, but if I had, I would give.” I think we need to translate the idiom of the Book of Mormon into the language of today. Instead of speaking of gold and silver and fine-twined linens, we should speak of mansions built ever higher up the hillside, multi-car garages, boats and fancy off-road vehicles, back-yard swimming pools and basement racquet-ball courts, summer cabins, country-club memberships, cruises to the Bahamas, and vacations to Acapulco. Are these the possessions we must have in order to sustain ourselves from day to day? Are these the needs we must satisfy before our hearts tell us we may now turn our attention to the poor, the sick, and the afflicted who all around us are suffering, often dying, from want of substance or attention?

I heard recently of a man who, when called to task for building himself a palatial home, replied: “All I have is the Lord’s. He can have it any time he wants it.” If I understand King Benjamin correctly, when we realize that we are “eternally indebted” to our “Heavenly Father,” we “render to him all that [we] have, and are,” finding opportunities for service without being asked. I am not arguing for an ascetic life of self-denial, that we must not enjoy any of the creature comforts produced by our labor. But the task of distinguishing between essential needs and superfluous wants will remain always with us. Too easily we forget Jacob’s assertion that it is all right to seek riches as long as we do so “for the intent to do

good; to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick, and the afflicted.” While our intentions are often good, too often they are like those of whom the prophet Ezekiel spoke: “With their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness” (33:31).

Some years ago, during Christmas vacation, a well-meaning and wealthy priesthood adviser planned to fly the young men in our ward in a private jet to his cabin at a well-known ski resort. I asked my son if he really thought it was a good idea to take the trip, which would leave his acquaintances in less fortunate circumstances with the idea that “the really good” church activities were available only to those who had money. My son remained home, partly to please me but partly, I hope, because he saw the contradiction between what we profess and what we practice, because he recognized the danger of being divided into classes. I have often thought how much better it would have been for those young men to have pooled their resources and, as many of our good members do every year, brought some Christmas joy into the life of a disadvantaged family.

Once again, the assistance we are asked to give may not be financial but rather emotional and spiritual help. Our most important substance may be love, a listening ear, a shoulder to lean on, forgiveness, empathy, encouragement. A short time ago the Relief Society sisters in the Tampere Ward in Finland spent weeks preparing kits for babies in Russian orphanages. Sisters in the Westland Ward in Ohio recently contributed over 1,000 hours making quilts, dolls, skirts, pajamas, hats, blankets, pants, shirts, bandages, mittens, and

dresses for the LDS Humanitarian Center. The sisters in a Highland, Utah, ward made twenty-eight quilts to send to Bosnia and then reported the great joy they had derived from the activity. Every year LDS doctors, dentists, and nurses travel to poverty-stricken parts of the world and provide crucial medical services to those who otherwise never would have received them. All through the church, loving members visit people in ill health who, without these visits, would spend their days staring vacantly at walls. Others offer rides to those who can no longer drive and have to depend on help to get themselves to doctors, grocery stores, or out of their confining quarters for a change of scenery. We are in the main a loving and caring people.

But we could do better. Offering this kind of assistance, rather than just giving money, requires a sacrifice of that most valuable commodity—time. Some years ago a brother in our ward had to paint the rain gutters on his roof. He suffered from painful arthritis. I knew that. I knew I should offer to help. I had other commitments, all seemingly worthy, and I could not bring myself to sacrifice the time. He painted his rain gutters alone, and the memory of that haunts me from time to time.

The greatest way to serve our fellow beings is, of course, to share with them the redeeming gospel of Jesus Christ. “I would desire,” said King Benjamin in one of the most moving passages in the Book of Mormon,

that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end, they are received into

Heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God, in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it.

These words being true, it is incumbent on us, in the words of Father Lehi, “to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth,” to stretch out our arms and hands to all our brothers and sisters around the globe in sharing the gospel of salvation.

Lehi’s admonition brings to the fore another set of my heroes: the four sons of Mosiah. We learn little about their actual missionary activities in the Book of Mosiah; these are recounted later in the Book of Alma. What we do learn is enough to remind us of our obligation to those not of the fold. The sons of Mosiah had turned against the church. Then, as a result of Alma the Younger’s dramatic encounter with an angel and because of the faithful prayers of the people, especially of Alma’s father, the young men made an abrupt about-face and traveled throughout the land “zealously striving to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church.” But this was not enough. They thought of the Lamanites, “who were their brethren,” and were concerned “for the welfare of their souls.” Filled with the missionary spirit, the sons of Mosiah and a few others, giving no thought for their own comfort or safety, traveled to the lands of their enemies “that perhaps they might bring them to the knowledge of the Lord their God,” for “they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish.” That same desire should move us to action today.

I will always be grateful to missionaries in England,

Wales, and Denmark who, filled with this same spirit and desirous that no soul should perish, brought my ancestors into the fold. I feel a strong obligation to repay them by doing for others what these missionaries did for my people. Hannele and I were privileged recently to serve as missionaries in Finland. Our faith was strengthened as we watched imperfect but wonderful young missionaries as bold as Abinadi, as faithful and believing as Alma the elder, and as committed as the sons of Mosiah get up each morning and, with almost infinite good cheer, leave their apartments to declare salvation to people often hostile to them. We were especially strengthened by the examples of humble senior missionary couples who stretched out their arms and touched both new and inactive members the younger missionaries could not reach. Their service was of a high order because it required a commitment of money and time—money they might have spent on themselves and time they might have used for their own pleasure.

Though I have long valued and found inspiration in the Book of Mormon, I have had only two experiences with the book that I will never forget. The first occurred when I first arrived in Finland in 1953. The Book of Mormon had not yet been translated into Finnish. A translation was finally published in December 1954. Not long thereafter my companion and I paid several visits to a kindly lady in a decrepit part of the city of Jyväskylä. I doubt she got much from our discussions. Primarily she seemed concerned that we were not dressed warmly enough for the Finnish winter. On one visit, I attempted to introduce her to the Book of Mormon, my arm outstretched, the book resting on the palm of my

hand. As I spoke of it, I felt what seemed to be a strong electric current running up my arm and filling my entire body. I soon realized that what I had experienced was not for her benefit but for me. From that time on, I led much more effective Book of Mormon discussions.

The second event occurred a short time ago while I was working on this essay. The 1954 Finnish translation of The Book of Mormon was not the best in the world, but it was adequate. Recently the church had it re-translated, along with the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price. All were bound in a three-in-one combination. I obtained a copy, and one night after Hannele had gone to bed I sat in my half darkened study and proceeded to read King Benjamin's sermon in Finnish. What happened next was something I have never experienced before. I seemed to be transported to Zarahemla, to be listening to the sermon as it was delivered, the words jumping off the page and into my mind and heart. I experienced the agony of realizing my insignificance and then an intense joy at hearing of how my family and I can return to our Heavenly Father's presence. I do not know how many times I have read King Benjamin's sermon, but I have never experienced anything close to that, before or since. A feeling of gratitude and love engulfed me as I realized the full impact of the story.

I came away from the experience with a more profound understanding of my obligation to others. At times when sleep escapes me, I close my eyes and still see before me the Dust Bowl refugees, although now I have a better understanding of the metaphorical significance of those outstretched arms and my duty toward them. As I re-read the

Book of Mormon, I realize that every major figure offers me assurance that if I will only mend my ways, I can chart a course that is pleasing to God. I have a long road to travel, but I realize that to be successful I must emulate Christ and freely, unselfishly, and lovingly sacrifice what I hold dear for the benefit of others. I must become a fearless defender of the faith. I must impart to others my material, spiritual, and emotional substance. Then the saving power of the atonement will begin to work in my life and I will experience that “blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God.” Unworthy and unprofitable servant that I am, I am nevertheless reminded by Benjamin of what an honor it has been to play a small part in this earthly drama in whatever way I can be of use.