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## "He Inviteth All to Come unto Him"

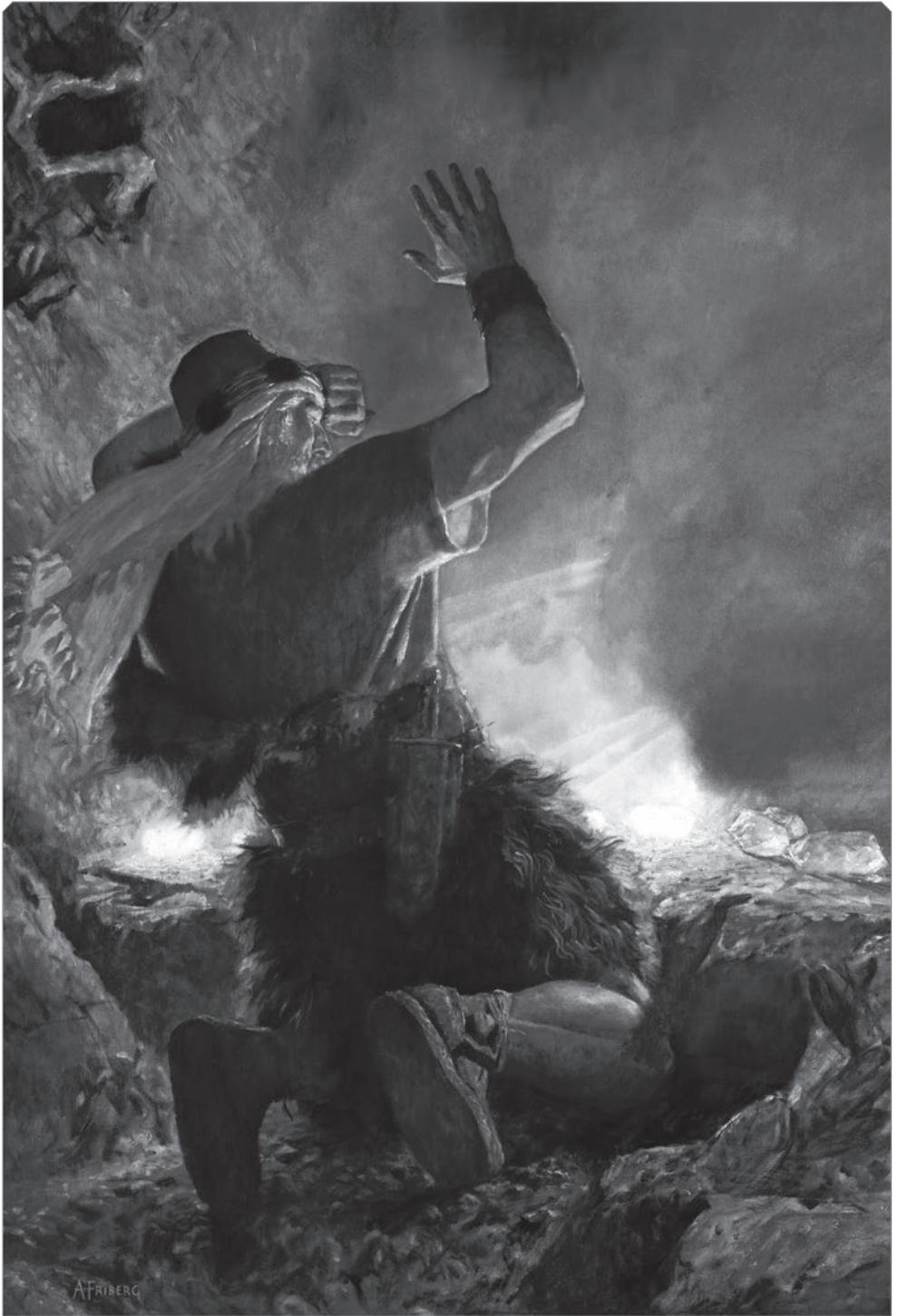
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The brother of Jared exercised tremendous faith.  
Yet even he was chastened by the Lord due to his negligence to call upon the name of the Lord.

# “He Inviteth All to Come unto Him”

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The Book of Mormon describes itself as a record of nations, and it directs itself to nations (see Book of Mormon, title page). Its messages in this context contain powerful truths from the Lord that warn modern Israel of challenges that would be present in the latter days (see D&C 38:39). Yet within the grand scope of these accounts come records of individuals who found themselves within the great movements of their own times, with their own challenges, doubts, revelations, and witnesses. For many of these individuals the record contains an account of their own personal spiritual journeys. Some came from families where the gospel appears to have been central in their lives, and yet suffered major crises of faith and obedience. Others came from ignorance and faithlessness and journeyed to stalwartness and immovability in the faith. Some, while raised by faithful parents, chose the path of rebellion for a time, but then repented and became outspoken witnesses of the Savior and his Atonement. In contrast, some remained silent for years until the moment came when they were able to openly share what they knew. Those who were faithful and committed became keenly aware of their own

weakness, and in humility turned their hearts once again to the Lord with pleas for desperately needed ongoing strength and assistance.

Among all these stories readers will find at least one individual, and likely many, with whose journey they can relate. More importantly, the discovery of key choices that were helpful to these heroes can guide readers in exercising faith, which will enable them to receive power from the Lord to overcome personal challenges today.

As teachers effectively help students to relate to these characters, students will be more willing and ready to read, understand, and internalize the doctrines taught repeatedly and powerfully throughout the narrative. Thus students can find direction and strength through these examples to make specific and uniquely personal choices of their own. These choices will fit within broad categories of choices made by disciples of the Lord. These can range from insights on how and where to pray to inspiration about what relationships, possessions, or attitudes may need to be sacrificed as they draw nearer to the Savior. These principles will then weave through their own miraculously changed life story, just like the stories of individuals from the Book of Mormon.

The purpose of this article is to highlight a few general categories of individuals whose examples may be useful in more clearly identifying the set of choices that lead people to becoming “firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end” (Alma 27:27). These categories were selected by assessing the stories of over forty individuals who the text shows beginning, renewing, or reaffirming in weakness their own faith in the Lord. This article will focus on those who were successful in this endeavor.

A powerful message of the Book of Mormon is that faith can be found from various spiritual starting points. Students will easily embrace the stories of the Book of Mormon, but in addition they must see the book as a guide to coming unto Christ and being perfected in him, no matter what their present spiritual situations and statuses may be like (see Moroni 10:32). While students may see their own situations as uniquely challenging, or even irreparably dark, the Book of Mormon will repeatedly make it clear that the Lord “inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him” (2 Nephi 26:33).

## Children of Goodly Parents

Nephi makes it clear in his first recorded words on his small, spiritually focused plates that he was blessed with parents who taught him the gospel (see 1 Nephi 1:1). Yet he indicates that while he had desires to know the mysteries of God, it was only when he cried unto the Lord for himself that the Lord visited him and allowed some softening of his heart to occur. Nephi seems to indicate that his belief in his father’s testimony came as a direct result of this experience. We are not told where Nephi prayed to receive this witness, but he seems to emphasize the individual and private nature of his encounter: “he did visit *me*, and did soften *my* heart” (1 Nephi 2:16; emphasis added). He cites this experience as the reason he did not follow his two oldest brothers in their path of rebellion (see 1 Nephi 2:16).

Enos, in his record, quickly established and expressed gratitude for the just nature of his father, and that his father taught him in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord.” His personal spiritual life, however, was not without challenges. He describes his journey of personal conversion and obtaining forgiveness from God as a “wrestle” (Enos 1:2). While he surely went into the forest to find food, perhaps some of the beasts he hunted were found within his own heart, even as a son of a prophet. There is no evidence, however, that Enos was guilty of any “great or malignant” sins (see Joseph Smith—History 1:28). Perhaps like most students of the gospel in seminary and institute classrooms, he would fit into the “I have good parents but sometimes struggle with my faith and repentance” category.

For both Enos and Nephi, the key to exiting their hardened or sinful state was the same: personal, private, fervent prayer. We know from the remainder of both accounts that prayer was a key in building a ship and transporting a family to the promised land (see 1 Nephi 18:3), as well as a key in securing promised blessings for future generations of the family of Lehi (see Enos 1:12, 16).

President Spencer W. Kimball taught, “Some things are best prayed about in private, where time and confidentiality are not considerations. Prayer in solitude is rich and profitable. Praying alone helps us to shed shame or pretense, any lingering deceit; it helps us open our hearts and be totally honest and honorable in expressing all of our hopes and attitudes.”<sup>1</sup> He additionally suggested, “We . . . ought to find, where possible, a room, a corner, a closet, a place where we can ‘retire’ to ‘pray vocally’ in secret.”<sup>2</sup>

Those who are unsure if their testimonies are dependent on the testimonies of their parents or others can follow these Book of Mormon examples

of personal, private, heartfelt prayer. The presence of such prayer in an individual's life is a key indicator that there will be ensuing spiritual growth.

### **Those without a Knowledge of the Gospel**

Lamoni, prior to Ammon's arrival, had very little knowledge of the true nature of God and the creation, and no knowledge of the Fall or Atonement (see Alma 18:24–32). Lamoni had been raised in a culture where killing was an acceptable means of showing displeasure towards others (see Alma 17:28). In fact, his own father was prepared to kill Lamoni when he was found in the friendly company of Ammon.

Ammon's effective testimony was crucial to Lamoni's conversion. Ammon helped Lamoni to understand his own lost and fallen state, as well as that of his people (see Alma 18:41). Eventually Lamoni's father and his brother Anti-Nephi-Lehi would fully embrace the gospel and lead their people on to a converted state from which they "never did fall away" (Alma 23:6).

We have records of the heartfelt prayers of both Lamoni and his father prior to their conversions. Each indicated in his respective prayer both the realization of complete dependence upon the Lord, and the need for his mercy in overcoming both the spiritual and physical shortcomings of mortality. Furthermore, each king in the verses prior to their prayers manifested a willingness to sacrifice whatever is required to gain a knowledge of God and to receive a greater measure of his mercies upon them. Whether in Lamoni's case, "whatsoever thou desirest I will give unto thee" (Alma 18:21), or in the words of his father, "I will give up all that I possess . . . that I may receive this great joy" (Alma 22:15), it is clear that in the minds of these kings, all earthly things were on the table in the pursuit of this knowledge and changed state. This demonstrates well the principle Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught, when he pointedly stated, "There are no conditions in unconditional surrender!"<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently, the people led by these kings unitedly removed from their lives items that had been central to their way of life. Their swords and other weapons soon found themselves buried deep into the earth as a testimony to God that the hearts of their owners had truly changed. The absence of swords became a readily visible outward manifestation of this inner change (see Alma 24:16).

Much earlier in the text, when Zoram realized his situation (see 1 Nephi 4:30–37), he was apparently willing to not only leave behind whatever family, friends, and way of life he had back in Jerusalem, but also to embrace his new

role within the extended structure of Lehi’s family (see 1 Nephi 16:7; 2 Nephi 1:30, 5:6).

Another significant example is that of the Mulekite leader Zarahemla. The record gives the impression that once he became aware of the truths of the gospel as presented to him by Mosiah (father of Benjamin) and company, he quite willingly sacrificed his throne and fell in with the newly constituted kingdom under King Mosiah (see Omni 1:14, 19). He and those who had been his subjects readily adopted new leadership, new language, newfound literacy, and most importantly, new faith. What a powerful effect this example would have on Zarahemla’s people for generations to come!

The Book of Mormon witnesses that a new heart is available to all who will sacrifice whatever the Lord requires. Few students will directly relate to turning from a murderous culture, or from personally abandoning royalty and power. Through these examples, however, they very likely will discern the significant sacrifices required of the Lord in their own lives, and will see that the Lord will give them power to put down less important worldly issues for those things of a far greater and eternal significance.

Understanding this principle is especially important as more and more students in our classrooms are raised in situations where extreme wickedness such as pornography, immorality, and substance abuse, not to mention physical, mental, and emotional abuse, are prevalent. Prophets have constantly and recently lamented over such problems.<sup>4</sup> The Book of Mormon encourages and gives reason for great hope for individuals who suffer in such circumstances.

### **Rebellious to Stalwart**

Unfortunately, sometimes despite the best efforts of parents in raising their children in the gospel, children who know gospel truths struggle to implement them in their own lives. Interestingly, there are numerous accounts in the Book of Mormon of individuals who had been raised in some degree of a gospel culture, had fallen away in a significant measure from the gospel, and finally were able to return to full gospel activity and become stalwart in the cause of truth.

Alma the son of Alma surely had been taught extensively by his own father regarding the plan of salvation. In his moment of great distress, he “remembered also to have heard [his] father prophesy unto the people the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world” (Alma 36:17). Earlier in the text we are told that while many of Alma’s generation

had some knowledge of “the tradition of their fathers,” many of them lacked real understanding of the principles of the Atonement as a result of their unbelief (Mosiah 26:1–3).

Many years prior, Alma’s father, Alma the Elder, had had struggles of his own. Even though he had been appointed at a young age as a priest in Noah’s court, and perhaps had some knowledge of the scriptures, prior to his conversion he had gotten caught up in the snare of the abominable culture of King Noah (see Mosiah 23:9). It is possible that Alma the Younger was born after his father’s conversion, and that he had little to no memory of his father’s pre-converted life.<sup>5</sup>

Alma the Younger, however, had become a “wicked and an idolatrous man” (Mosiah 27:8). We aren’t told if his struggles directly related to the “dissensions among the brethren” referenced in Mosiah 26:5, or if it was mainly a function of falling in with friends who had similar struggles (see Mosiah 27:8). Either way, while he possibly stood with his father publicly, his secret actions were designed to destroy the Church, and were very much aligned with the adversary of all men (see Mosiah 27:8–9; Revelation 12:7–9, 13:7). Ammon, Aaron, Omner, and Himni—the sons of King Mosiah—were additional partners in these secret works (see Mosiah 27:10).

Amulek’s situation, when we are introduced to him, has some similar themes. We aren’t told how long he had lived among the people of Ammonihah, or how fully he had embraced the doctrines of Nehor, but he indicates that in spite of his knowledge of the ways of the Lord he “did harden [his] heart, for [he] was called many times and [he] would not hear” (Alma 10:6). If we assume that the establishment or apostasy of Ammonihah post-dated the rise and fall of Nehor, then Amulek and the rest of the Ammonihahites were fewer than ten years removed from the Church. Although less than a decade had passed, the religious life of Ammonihah had significantly shifted from the one established by King Mosiah.

Much later in the text, a man by the name of Aminadab found himself among the Lamanites who were preparing to end the lives of two of God’s faithful messengers, Nephi and Lehi. We are told that although he was a Nephite by birth, and although he had previously belonged to the church, he had dissented from it.

For each of these individuals, a moment came where a key and clear choice between righteousness and evil was required. A frank personal spiritual assessment was made, and the necessary choice became evidently clear.

These moments were often connected to the prayers of faithful servants of God who had love and concern for the individuals in question.

Aminadab was in the presence of two powerful prophet-missionaries who may well have been directly praying for, among other things, their captors and near-executioners. As the protecting powers of heaven descended upon Nephi and Lehi, Aminadab was asked by the solemnly fearful Lamanites with him, “What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?” (Helaman 5:40). The apostate in a matter of moments chose to become a missionary as he declared, “You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ, . . . and when ye shall do this, the cloud of darkness shall be removed from overshadowing you” (Helaman 5:41). His efforts were successful for not only himself, but for three hundred souls who were “bidden to go forth, and marvel not, neither should they doubt” (Helaman 5:49). They heeded this injunction to the point that the more part of the Lamanites were converted, laid down their weapons, and yielded up to the Nephites lands that had been warred over for a generation (see Helaman 5:51–52).

Amulek was met by an angel and commanded to feed and house a prophet of God (see Alma 8:20). He immediately chose to fulfill his role upon encountering Alma. We aren’t told exactly how many days passed between this event and the moment where Amulek chose to stand before his own rebellious and apostate people to bear his powerful testimony to them. Nevertheless, he stood and delivered some of the most important doctrinal expositions found in the Book of Mormon. This witness came at great personal cost for himself; he was rejected by his people, and members of his own family may have been among those who were cast into the fire (see Alma 14:8, 11).

The pages in the heart of the Book of Mormon are filled with the testimonies of Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah. While they would be powerfully ministered to by an angel with the voice of thunder, the record would make clear that it was additional “fast[ing] and pray[ing] many days” that would allow Alma the Younger to know these things of himself (Alma 5:46). The sons of Mosiah “had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know” as well as “given themselves to much prayer, and fasting” (Alma 17:2–3). While the faithful paths of these men began with dramatic moments of awareness and public affirmation of truth, the remainder of their lives, like Alma the Elder’s before them, were dedicated to openly preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, and building the very kingdom they had previously sought

to destroy. These public announcements came at much personal cost and at extreme physical sacrifice.

These powerful stories might leave some to wonder if angelic manifestations are required to bring about the return of those who have been previously taught the gospel, but have let their spiritual reservoirs go dry. They may question whether or not there is there hope for those who have waived in the absence of such angelic ministrations. The story of Corianton is instructive on this point.

The details of Corianton's distractions in the land of Siron are not given, other than that he began the figurative path there through boasting in his own strength and wisdom (see Alma 39:2). We have no record of an angel with a voice of thunder presenting himself to Corianton in an attempt to shock him back into the ways of faithfulness.

What we do have, however, is the account of the inspired teaching of a father who, although he did not in this instance "speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth" (Alma 29:1), he did speak as an angel would, by the power of the Holy Ghost (see 2 Nephi 32:3; Moroni 7:29–30). He, under this heavenly influence, said the very things that his struggling son needed to hear.

Each segment of Alma's counsel begins with a phrase such as "I perceive that thy mind is worried concerning . . ." (Alma 40:1; 41:1) or "I perceive that there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind" (Alma 42:1). It was doctrine spoken by the power of the spirit that would motivate and enlighten Corianton's mind so that he could align his behavior with the Lord's expectations. As we have been reminded by President Boyd K. Packer many times, "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior."<sup>6</sup> This is especially true when spoken from the heart by parents prepared and informed by the Spirit in addressing specific needs of their children.

Following Alma's counsel, Corianton resumed his ministry and the record indicates that he continued to do so into the future (see Alma 42:31, 49:30).

The Lord reaches out to those who have wandered from the strait and narrow path, sometimes with dramatic manifestations of his power and glory. Often, however, the inspired words of a prayerful parent can also serve as the miracle needed in the lives of wayward children. The Lord has made promises repeatedly through prophets and apostles in our day that faithful parents who keep covenants will see their wayward children return, sooner or later, to the

fold of their families.<sup>7</sup> The faith of such parents brings down miracles in the lives of their children.

Those so miraculously moved must make a definitive and open choice to follow the Lord, and then commence a life of faithful fasting and prayerfulness to remain true to what they once again know in their hearts (see Alma 5:46). The power of the Atonement gives strength then for individuals to stay true, even in the most trying and lonely of circumstances.

### **Witnesses in Waiting**

Sometimes those who have testimonies of the gospel are prevented from sharing their conversion witness due to circumstances around them and outside of their control. Abish the Lamanite seems to fit in this category.

While we don't know Abish's age at the time of the conversion of King Lamoni, we do know that her father had had a remarkable vision, the recounting of which led to her conversion. We aren't told if anyone else had been converted as a result of her father's witness, but implied in the story is the idea that for many years she silently held to this knowledge (see Alma 19:16). To speak of such things in her time and place would have been difficult if not deadly. Additionally, we aren't told of any direction given to her from the Lord to openly share this witness. Having observed the events following Ammon's testimony and Lamoni's prayer, she immediately sprang into action. She was precisely where her witness could be instrumental in gathering many of her people to feel the powerful manifestations of the Spirit of the Lord. Her prior steadfastness in silence was instrumental in the conversion of many who, following the day's events, "did all declare unto the people the self-same thing—that their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil" (Alma 19:33).

For much of his youth and for part of his adult life, Mormon was in a situation similar in some ways to Abish's. Identified early as one who was "quick to observe" by the record keeper Ammaron (Mormon 1:2), Mormon was given secret instructions regarding the location and maintenance of the Nephite record. He tells us that during his childhood "there were no gifts from the Lord, and the Holy Ghost did not come upon any, because of their wickedness and unbelief" (Mormon 1:14).

At the age of fifteen, Mormon "was visited of the Lord, and tasted and knew of the goodness of Jesus" (Mormon 1:15). As was Lehi's desire in his

dream of the tree of life, Mormon's first reaction was to share the joy that he felt as a result of this experience (see 1 Nephi 8:12; Mormon 1:16).

While he doesn't give the details, Mormon does tell us that he was forbidden from preaching unto the Nephites due to "the hardness of their hearts," and because they had "willfully rebelled against their God" (Mormon 1:16-17).

The Lord's plan became apparent when in the following year Mormon, at the age of sixteen, became the leader of the Nephite army just prior to the beginning of a war between the Nephites and the Lamanites (see Mormon 2:1-2). Mormon led the armies of the Nephites for the following thirty-four years before the Lord gave him permission to cry repentance unto the people and attempt to build up the Church among them (see Mormon 3:1-2). Despite his efforts, Mormon tells us that his public efforts at that time were in vain (see Mormon 3:3). Two years later, Mormon resigned his command as a result of the blasphemous oaths of the Nephites regarding their intended revenge against their enemies (see Mormon 3:10-11).

We aren't told the extent of Mormon's public preaching in the years between his two episodes of commanding the Nephite armies. We know that a powerful discourse was given at some point in a synagogue during his ministry, which was preserved by his son, Moroni, upon the final leaves of the plates of Mormon (see Moroni 7). Sadly, Mormon's mission among his own people seems to have been primarily that of an inspired "idle witness" (Mormon 3:16) to the events leading up to their destruction.

On the other hand, as a consequence of Mormon's faithfulness, his son Moroni served diligently for decades. While physically alone, Moroni prepared the witness of his father to be given to the world as an important instrument with which all of latter-day Israel would be gathered in preparation for the Lord's coming.<sup>8</sup> Mormon's testimony stands as one of the greatest witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some of our seminary and institute students may be prevented from sharing their testimonies at home, whether under the direction of a faithless parent or in an environment where bearing such testimony isn't allowed. These students can find strength and assurance from the examples of these two amazing disciples of the Savior. These difficult periods may well be part of the Lord's greater plan, preparing them to be more powerful witnesses to their future families, friends, and acquaintances. Additionally, there may be many individuals who currently reside in countries where the gospel is not allowed

who have found the truth by way of the Internet or miraculous events. They may well now sit silently, waiting for the moment when their testimonies can be shared publicly and powerfully.

### **Fleeting Falterings of the Faithful**

Lehi, known for his obedience to the Lord, led his family into the wilderness at the Lord’s direction. When the group found themselves without food to sustain their journey, this wonderful prophet became subject to murmurings similar to those of which he had continually warned his older sons (see 1 Nephi 2:11–14; 3:5; 16:20). His faithful wife, earlier in the journey, had also had her moment of murmuring at the fear of the loss of her sons (see 1 Nephi 5:1–3).

The brother of Jared exercised tremendous faith. Yet even he on his journey to the promised land was chastened at length by the Lord due to his negligence to call upon the name of the Lord (see Ether 2:15).

Why are such weak moments of these amazing individuals put on public display for the whole world to read about? More importantly, how did these individuals recover from these moments of feeling unprepared to serve and be in the presence of the Lord? Their prayers in subsequent moments are tremendously instructive.

Nephi the son of Lehi gives us an insight into his own challenges. Despite his unwavering standing in and for the cause of the Lord, he exclaimed, “O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities” (2 Nephi 4:17). These words do not express a lack of faith in the Lord. On the contrary, Nephi expresses a penetrating understanding that even in his righteous state, he is overwhelmingly dependent on the Lord. Nephi humbly pled, “O Lord, wilt thou redeem my soul? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?” (2 Nephi 4:31).

The brother of Jared in another moment pled, “Now behold, O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee; for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires” (Ether 3:2).

Lehi would, at a later date and in the midst of another challenge exclaim, “hear the words of a trembling parent, whose limbs ye must soon lay down in the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return; a few more days and I go the way of all the earth. But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love” (2 Nephi 1:14–15). At Lehi’s point of prior murmuring, he responded by hearing the voice of the Lord, and humbling himself at the Lord’s direction (see 1 Nephi 16:25–27). It is clear that Lehi understood the source from which his own salvation came and just how dependent he was on the Lord.

Each of these stalwarts found the need to plead to the Lord, acknowledging their own weakness and inadequacy. They petitioned the Lord for help to overcome their ongoing weakness, even though each individual had realized vast progress in their lives towards perfection.

None of us can become casual in our discipleship without faltering in some measure. While these prayers all reflect confidence, the trust never lies in the power of the individual, but in the power of the Lord. A continual acknowledgement of their own (and of all of our) very needful state before the Lord is a theme of multiple Book of Mormon prophets (see Mosiah 2:25, 11:23; Alma 5:4). The scriptures warn us repeatedly that we must not rely in our own strength. The more we truly know the Lord, the more we will understand just how much we need his help. Students who understand this principle will not be so prone to condemn others in their own weakness, and will bear more humble and powerful testimonies to their peers as they continue the humble path of true spiritual growth. Humility in weakness is a hallmark of a powerful disciple of the Savior.

## Conclusion

A key purpose of the Book of Mormon is to show unto the house of Israel “that they are not cast off forever” on condition of repentance and faith in the Savior (Book of Mormon, title page). Both ancient and modern prophets have emphasized this important truth.<sup>9</sup>

Those who are raised in the gospel can establish a private, powerful, and personal relationship with their Heavenly Father in humble prayer. Those raised in settings completely contrary to the gospel can find peace and healing as they fully turn to the Lord and sacrifice whatever elements of their lives are not pleasing to the Lord. Those in rebellion can make key choices

in key moments, followed up by continued fasting and prayer to become well established in the gospel. Those who are prevented from openly sharing their testimonies will find sustaining strength and direction from the Lord as they navigate their lives amongst those who refuse to hear or believe, and will emerge as powerful witnesses of the Lord’s gospel. Finally, even those who are well along the paths of discipleship can have moments where the remnants of their fallen natures become patently obvious. In these moments they can turn to the Lord in humility and with an ongoing acknowledgement of dependence on him. In so doing they will find the strength to continue their lifelong journey of faithfulness and endurance to the end.

As individuals who seek to come unto Christ search the pages of the Book of Mormon, the records of many effective role models from diverse backgrounds and situations will give readers hope in their own journeys to the Savior, no matter where they may find themselves today. **RE**

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## Notes

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “Pray Always,” *Ensign*, October 1981, 4.
2. Kimball, “Pray Always,” 4.
3. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Great Plan of the Eternal God,” *Ensign*, May 1984, 22.
4. Thomas S. Monson, “Believe, Obey, and Endure,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 126.
5. Arthur R. Bassett, “Alma the Elder,” *Ensign*, February 1977, 7.
6. Boyd K. Packer, “Do Not Fear,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 79.
7. “Hope for Parents of Wayward Children,” *Ensign*, September 2002, 11.
8. Russell M. Nelson, “The Gathering of Scattered Israel,” *Ensign*, November 2006, 84.
9. Boyd K. Packer, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 19.